HAROLD

THE LAST OF THE SAXON KINGS

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"Wed, wed," murmured the betrothed; "wed at last!"

HAROLD

THE LAST OF THE SAXON KINGS

By

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VOLUME II

Charles Scribner's Sons
New York 1903

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HAROLD,

THE LAST OF THE SAXON KINGS

BOOK VIII

FATE

CHAPTER I

Some days after the tragical event with which the last chapter closed, the ships of the Saxons were assembled in the wide waters of Conway; and on the small fore-deck of the stateliest vessel, stood Harold, bareheaded, before Aldyth, the widowed Queen. For the faithful bard had fallen by the side of his lord; . . . the dark promise was unfulfilled, and the mangled clay of the jealous Gryffyth slept *alone* in the narrow bed. A chair of state, with dossel and canopy, was set for the daughter of Algar, and behind stood maidens of Wales, selected in haste for her attendants.

But Aldyth had not seated herself; and, side by side with her dead lord's great victor, thus she spoke:

"Woe worth the day and the hour when Aldyth left the hall of her fathers and the land of her birth! Her robe of a queen has been rent and torn over an aching heart, and the air she has breathed has reeked as with

blood. I go forth, widowed, and homeless, and lonely; but my feet shall press the soil of my sires, and my lips draw the breath which came sweet and pure to my childhood. And thou, O Harold, standest beside me, like the shape of my own youth, and the dreams of old come back at the sound of thy voice. Fare thee well, noble heart and true Saxon. Thou hast twice saved the child of thy foe—first from shame, then from famine. Thou wouldst have saved my dread lord from open force, and dark murder; but the saints were wroth, the blood of my kinsfolk, shed by his hand, called for vengeance, and the shrines he had pillaged and burned murmured doom from their desolate altars. Peace be with the dead, and peace with the living! I shall go back to my father and brethren; and if the fame and life of child and sister be dear to them, their swords will never more leave their sheaths against Harold. So thy hand, and God guard thee!"

Harold raised to his lips the hand which the Queen extended to him; and to Aldyth now seemed restored the rare beauty of her youth; as pride and sorrow gave her the charm of emotion, which love and duty had failed to bestow.

"Life and health to thee, noble lady," said the Earl. "Tell thy kindred from me, that for thy sake, and thy grandsire's, I would fain be their brother and friend; were they but united with me, all England were now safe against every foe, and each peril. Thy daughter already awaits thee in the halls of Morcar; and when time has scarred the wounds of the past, may thy joys re-bloom in the face of thy child. Farewell, noble Aldyth!"

He dropped the hand he had held till then, turned slowly to the side of the vessel, and re-entered his boat.

As he was rowed back to shore, the horn gave the signal for raising anchor, and the ship, righting itself, moved majestically through the midst of the fleet. But Aldyth still stood erect, and her eyes followed the boat that bore away the secret love of her youth.

As Harold reached the shore, Tostig and the Norman, who had been conversing amicably together on the beach, advanced towards the Earl.

"Brother," said Tostig, smiling, "it were easy for thee to console the fair widow, and bring to our House all the force of East Anglia and Mercia." Harold's face slightly changed, but he made no answer.

"A marvellous fair dame," said the Norman, "notwithstanding her cheek be somewhat pinched, and the hue sunburnt. And I wonder not that the poor catking kept her so close to his side."

"Sir Norman," said the Earl, hastening to change the subject, "the war is now over, and, for long years, Wales will leave our Marches in peace.—This eve I propose to ride hence towards London, and we will converse by the way."

"Go you so soon?" cried the knight, surprised. "Shall you not take means utterly to subjugate this troublesome race, parcel out the lands among your thegns, to hold as martial fiefs at need, build towers and forts on the heights, and at the river mouths?—where a site, like this, for some fair castle and vawmure? In a word, do you Saxons merely overrun, and neglect to hold what you win?"

"We fight in self-defence, not for conquest, Sir Norman. We have no skill in building castles; and I pray you not to hint to my thegns the conceit of dividing a land, as thieves would their plunder. King Gryffyth is dead, and his brothers will reign in his stead. Eng-

land has guarded her realm, and chastised the aggressors. What need England do more? We are not like our first barbarous fathers, carving out homes with the scythe of their sæxes. The wave settles after the flood, and the races of men after lawless convulsions."

Tostig smiled, in disdain, at the knight, who mused a little over the strange words he had heard, and then silently followed the Earl to the fort.

But when Harold gained his chamber, he found there an express, arrived in haste from Chester, with the news that Algar, the sole enemy and single rival of his power, was no more. Fever, occasioned by neglected wounds, had stretched him impotent on a bed of sickness, and his fierce passions had aided the march of disease; the restless and profitless race was run.

The first emotion which these tidings called forth was that of pain. The bold sympathise with the bold; and in great hearts, there is always a certain friendship for a gallant foe. But recovering the shock of that first impression, Harold could not but feel that England was free from its most dangerous subject—himself from the only obstacle apparent to the fulfilment of his luminous career.

"Now, then, to London," whispered the voice of his ambition. "Not a foe rests to trouble the peace of that empire which thy conquests, O Harold, have made more secure and compact than ever yet has been the realm of the Saxon kings. Thy way through the country that thou hast henceforth delivered from the fire and sword of the mountain ravager, will be one march of triumph, like a Roman's of old; and the voice of the people will echo the hearts of the army; those hearts are thine own. Verily Hilda is a prophetess; and when Edward rests with the saints, from what

English heart will not burst the cry, "LONG LIVE HAROLD THE KING"?

CHAPTER II

The Norman rode by the side of Harold, in the rear of the victorious armament. The ships sailed to their havens, and Tostig departed to his northern earldom.

"And now," said Harold, "I am at leisure to thank thee, brave Norman, for more than thine aid in council and war;—at leisure now to turn to the last prayer of Sweyn, and the often-shed tears of Githa my mother, for Wolnoth the exile. Thou seest with thine own eyes that there is no longer pretext or plea for thy Count to detain these hostages. Thou shalt hear from Edward himself that he no longer asks sureties for the faith of the House of Godwin; and I cannot think that Duke William would have suffered thee to bring me over this news from the dead if he were not prepared to do justice to the living."

"Your speech, Earl of Wessex, goes near to the truth. But, to speak plainly and frankly, I think William, my lord, hath a keen desire to welcome in person a chief so illustrious as Harold, and I guess that he keeps the hostages to make thee come to claim them." The knight, as he spoke, smiled gaily; but the cunning of the Norman gleamed in the quick glance of his clear hazel eye.

"Fain must I feel pride at such wish, if you flatter me not," said Harold; "and I would gladly myself, now the land is in peace, and my presence not needful, visit a court of such fame. I hear high praise from cheapman and pilgrim of Count William's wise care for bar-

ter and trade, and might learn much from the ports of the Seine that would profit the marts of the Thames. Much, too, I hear of Count William's zeal to revive the learning of the Church, aided by Lanfranc the Lombard; much I hear of the pomp of his buildings, and the grace of his court. All this would I cheerfully cross the ocean to see; but all this would but sadden my heart if I returned without Haco and Wolnoth."

"I dare not speak so as to plight faith for the Duke," said the Norman, who, though sharp to deceive, had that rein on his conscience that it did not let him openly lie; "but this I do know, that there are few things in his Countdom which my lord would not give to clasp the right hand of Harold and feel assured of his friendship."

Though wise and farseeing, Harold was not suspicious;—no Englishman, unless it were Edward himself, knew the secret pretensions of William to the English throne; and he answered simply:

"It were well, indeed, both for Normandy and England, both against foes and for trade, to be allied and well-liking. I will think over your words, Sire de Graville, and it shall not be my fault if old feuds be not forgotten, and those now in thy court be the last hostages ever kept by the Norman for the faith of the Saxon."

With that he turned the discourse; and the aspiring and able envoy, exhilarated by the hope of a successful mission, animated the way by remarks—alternately lively and shrewd—which drew the brooding Earl from those musings, which had now grown habitual to a mind once clear and open as the day.

Harold had not miscalculated the enthusiasm his victories had excited. Where he passed, all the towns

poured forth their populations to see and to hail him; and on arriving at the metropolis, the rejoicings in his honour seemed to equal those which had greeted, at the accession of Edward, the restoration of the line of Cerdic.

According to the barbarous custom of the age, the head of the unfortunate sub-king, and the prow of his special war-ship, had been sent to Edward as the trophies of conquest: but Harold's uniform moderation respected the living. The race of Gryffyth [1] were re-established on the tributary throne of that hero, in the persons of his brothers, Blethgent and Rigwatle, "and they swore oaths," says the graphic old chronicler, "and delivered hostages to the King and the Earl that they would be faithful to him in all things, and be everywhere ready for him, by water, and by land, and make such renders from the land as had been done before to any other king."

Not long after this, Mallet de Graville returned to Normandy, with gifts for William from King Edward, and special requests from that prince, as well as from the Earl, to restore the hostages. But Mallet's acuteness readily perceived, that in much Edward's mind had been alienated from William. It was clear, that the Duke's marriage and the pledges that had crowned the union were distasteful to the asceticism of the saint king: and with Godwin's death, and Tostig's absence from the court, seemed to have expired all Edward's bitterness towards that powerful family of which Harold was now the head. Still, as no subject out of the House of Cerdic had ever yet been elected to the Saxon throne, there was no apprehension on Mallet's mind

[1] Gryffyth left a son, Caradoc; but he was put aside as a minor, according to the Saxon customs.

that in Harold was the true rival to William's cherished aspirations. Though Edward the Atheling was dead, his son Edgar lived, the natural heir to the throne; and the Norman, (whose liege had succeeded to the Duchy at the age of eight,) was not sufficiently cognisant of the invariable custom of the Anglo-Saxons, to set aside, whether for kingdoms or for earldoms, all claimants unfitted for rule by their tender years. He could indeed perceive that the young Atheling's minority was in favour of his Norman liege, and would render him but a weak defender of the realm, and that there seemed no popular attachment to the infant orphan of the Germanised exile: his name was never mentioned at the court, nor had Edward acknowledged him as heir,—a circumstance which he interpreted auspiciously for William. Nevertheless, it was clear that, both at court and amongst the people, the Norman influence in England was at the lowest ebb; and that the only man who could restore it, and realise the cherished dreams of his grasping lord, was Harold the all-powerful.

CHAPTER III

Trusting, for the time, to the success of Edward's urgent demand for the release of his kinsmen, as well as his own, Harold was now detained at the court by all those arrears of business which had accumulated fast under the inert hands of the monk-king during the prolonged campaigns against the Welch; but he had leisure at least for frequent visits to the old Roman house; and those visits were not more grateful to his love than to the harder and more engrossing passion which divided his heart.

The nearer he grew to the dazzling object, to the possession of which Fate seemed to have shaped all circumstances, the more he felt the charm of those mystic influences which his colder reason had disdained. He who is ambitious of things afar, and uncertain, passes at once into the Poet-Land of Imagination; to aspire and to imagine are yearnings twin-born.

When in his fresh youth and his calm lofty manhood, Harold saw action, how adventurous soever, limited to the barriers of noble duty; when he lived but for his country, all spread clear before his vision in the sunlight of day; but as the barriers receded, while the horizon extended, his eye left the Certain to rest on the Vague. As self, though still half concealed from his conscience, gradually assumed the wide space love of country had filled, the maze of delusion commenced: he was to shape fate out of circumstance,—no longer defy fate through virtue; and thus Hilda became to him as a voice that answered the questions of his own restless heart. He needed encouragement from the Unknown to sanction his desires and confirm his ends. But Edith, rejoicing in the fair fame of her betrothed, and content in the pure rapture of beholding him again, reposed in the divine credulity of the happy hour; she marked not, in Harold's visits, that, on entrance, the Earl's eyes sought first the stern face of the Vala—she wondered not why those two conversed in whispers together, or stood so often at moonlight by the Runic grave. Alone, of all womankind, she felt that Harold loved her, that that love had braved time, absence, change, and hope deferred; and she knew not that what love has most to dread in the wild heart of aspiring man, is not persons, but things,—is not things, but their symbols.

So weeks and months rolled on, and Duke William returned no answer to the demands for his hostages. And Harold's heart smote him, that he neglected his brother's prayer and his mother's accusing tears.

Now Githa, since the death of her husband, had lived in seclusion and apart from town; and one day Harold was surprised by her unexpected arrival at the large timbered house in London, which had passed to his possession. As she abruptly entered the room in which he sate, he sprang forward to welcome and embrace her; but she waved him back with a grave and mournful gesture, and sinking on one knee, she said thus:

"See, the mother is a suppliant to the son for the son. No, Harold, no—I will not rise till thou hast heard me. For years, long and lonely, have I lingered and pined, —long years! Will my boy know his mother again? Thou hast said to me, 'Wait till the messenger returns.' I have waited. Thou hast said, 'This time the Count cannot resist the demand of the King.' I bowed my head and submitted to thee as I had done to Godwin my lord. And I have not till now claimed thy promise; for I allowed thy country, thy King, and thy fame to have claims more strong than a mother. Now I tarry no more; now no more will I be amused and deceived. Thine hours are thine own—free thy coming and thy going. Harold, I claim thine oath. Harold, I touch thy right hand. Harold, I remind thee of thy troth and thy plight, to cross the seas thyself, and restore the child to the mother."

"Oh, rise, rise!" exclaimed Harold, deeply moved. "Patient hast thou been, O my mother, and now I will linger no more, nor hearken to other voice than your

own. I will see the King this day, and ask his leave to cross the sea to Duke William."

Then Githa rose, and fell on the Earl's breast weeping.

CHAPTER IV

It so chanced, while this interview took place between Githa and the Earl, that Gurth, hawking in the woodlands round Hilda's house, turned aside to visit his Danish kinswoman. The prophetess was absent, but he was told that Edith was within; and Gurth, about to be united to a maiden who had long won his noble affections, cherished a brother's love for his brother's fair betrothed. He entered the gynœcium, and there still, as when we were first made present in that chamber, sate the maids, employed on a work more brilliant to the eye, and more pleasing to the labour, than that which had then tasked their active hands. They were broidering into a tissue of the purest gold the effigy of a fighting warrior, designed by Hilda for the banner of Earl Harold: and, removed from the awe of their mistress, as they worked their tongues sang gaily, and it was in the midst of song and laughter that the fair young Saxon lord entered the chamber. The babble and the mirth ceased at his entrance; each voice was stilled, each eye cast down demurely. Edith was not amongst them, and in answer to his inquiry the eldest of the maidens pointed towards the peristyle without the house.

The winning and kindly thegn paused a few moments, to admire the tissue and commend the work, and then sought the peristyle.

Near the water-spring that gushed free and bright

through the Roman fountain, he found Edith, seated in an attitude of deep thought and gloomy dejection. She started as he approached, and, springing forward to meet him, exclaimed:

"O Gurth, Heaven hath sent thee to me, I know well, though I cannot explain to thee why, for I cannot explain it to myself; but know I do, by the mysterious bodements of my own soul, that some great danger is at this moment encircling thy brother Harold. Go to him, I pray, I implore thee, forthwith; and let thy clear sense and warm heart be by his side."

"I will go instantly," said Gurth, startled. "But do not suffer, I adjure thee, sweet kinswoman, the superstition that wraps this place, as a mist wraps a marsh, to infect thy pure spirit. In my early youth I submitted to the influence of Hilda; I became man, and outgrew it. Much, secretly, has it grieved me of late, to see that our kinswoman's Danish lore has brought even the strong heart of Harold under her spell; and where once he only spoke of *duty*, I now hear him speak of *fate*."

"Alas! alas!" answered Edith, wringing her hands; "when the bird hides its head in the brake, doth it shut out the track of the hound? Can we baffle fate by refusing to heed its approaches? But we waste precious moments. Go, Gurth, dear Gurth! Heavier and darker, while we speak, gathers the cloud on my heart."

Gurth said no more, but hastened to remount his steed; and Edith remained alone by the Roman fountain, motionless and sad, as if the nymph of the old religion stood there to see the lessening stream well away from the shattered stone, and know that the life of the nymph was measured by the ebb of the stream.

Gurth arrived in London just as Harold was taking a boat for the palace of Westminster, to seek the King; and, after interchanging a hurried embrace with his mother, he accompanied Harold to the palace, and learned his errand by the way. While Harold spoke, he did not foresee any danger to be incurred by a friendly visit to the Norman court; and the interval that elapsed between Harold's communication and their entrance into the King's chamber, allowed no time for mature and careful reflection.

Edward, on whom years and infirmity had increased of late with rapid ravage, heard Harold's request with a grave and deep attention, which he seldom vouchsafed to earthly affairs. And he remained long silent after his brother-in-law had finished;—so long silent, that the Earl, at first, deemed that he was absorbed in one of those mystic and abstracted reveries, in which, more and more as he grew nearer to the borders of the World Unseen, Edward so strangely indulged. But, looking more close, both he and Gurth were struck by the evident dismay on the King's face, while the collected light of Edward's cold eye showed that his mind was awake to the human world. In truth, it is probable that Edward, at that moment, was recalling rash hints, if not promises, to his rapacious cousin of Normandy, made during his exile. And, sensible of his own declining health, and the tender years of the young Edgar, he might be musing over the terrible pretender to the English throne, whose claims his earlier indiscretion might seem to sanction. Whatever his thoughts, they were dark and sinister, as at length he said, slowly:

"Is thine oath indeed given to thy mother, and doth she keep thee to it?"

"Both, O King," answered Harold, briefly.

"Then I can gainsay thee not. And thou, Harold, art a man of this living world; thou playest here the part of a centurion; thou sayst 'Come,' and men come —'Go,' and men move at thy will. Therefore thou mayest well judge for thyself. I gainsay thee not, nor interfere between man and his vow. But think not," continued the King in a more solemn voice, and with increasing emotion, "think not that I will charge my soul that I counselled or encouraged this errand. Yea, I foresee that thy journey will lead but to great evil to England, and sore grief or dire loss to thee." [1]

"How so, dear lord and King?" said Harold, startled by Edward's unwonted earnestness, though deeming it but one of the visionary chimeras habitual to the saint. "How so? William thy cousin hath ever borne the name of one fair to friend, though fierce to foe. And foul indeed his dishonour, if he could meditate harm to a man trusting his faith, and sheltered by his own roof-tree."

"Harold, Harold," said Edward, impatiently, "I know William of old. Nor is he so simple of mind, that he will cede aught for thy pleasure, or even to my will, unless it bring some gain to himself.[2] I say no more.—Thou art cautioned, and I leave the rest to Heaven."

It is the misfortune of men little famous for worldly lore, that in those few occasions when, in that sagacity caused by their very freedom from the strife and passion of those around, they seem almost prophetically inspired,—it is their misfortune to lack the power of conveying to others their own convictions; they may di-

[1] Bromton *Chron.*, Knyghton, Walsingham, Hoveden, &c.
[2] Bromton, Knyghton, &c.

vine, but they cannot reason: and Harold could detect nothing to deter his purpose, in a vague fear, based on no other argument than as vague a perception of the Duke's general character. But Gurth, listening less to his reason than his devoted love for his brother, took alarm, and said, after a pause:

"Thinkest thou, good my King, that the same danger were incurred if Gurth, instead of Harold, crossed the seas to demand the hostages?"

"No," said Edward, eagerly, "and so would I counsel. William would not have the same objects to gain in practising his worldly guile upon thee. No; methinks *that* were the prudent course."

"And the ignoble one for Harold," said the elder brother, almost indignantly. "Howbeit, I thank thee, gratefully, dear King, for thy affectionate heed and care. And so the saints guard thee!"

On leaving the King, a warm discussion between the brothers took place. But Gurth's arguments were stronger than those of Harold, and the Earl was driven to rest his persistence on his own special pledge to Githa. As soon, however, as they had gained their home, that plea was taken from him; for the moment Gurth related to his mother Edward's fears and cautions, she, ever mindful of Godwin's preference for the Earl, and his last commands to her, hastened to release Harold from his pledge; and to implore him at least to suffer Gurth to be his substitute to the Norman court. "Listen dispassionately," said Gurth; "rely upon it that Edward has reasons for his fears, more rational than those he has given to us. He knows William from his youth upward, and hath loved him too well to hint doubts of his good faith without just foundation. Are there no reasons why danger from Will-

iam should be special against thyself? While the Normans abounded in the court, there were rumours that the Duke had some designs on England, which Edward's preference seemed to sanction: such designs now, in the altered state of England, were absurd—too frantic, for a prince of William's reputed wisdom to entertain. Yet he may not unnaturally seek to regain the former Norman influence in these realms. He knows that in you he receives the most powerful man in England; that your detention alone would convulse the country from one end of it to the other; and enable him, perhaps, to extort from Edward some measures dishonourable to us all. But against me he can harbour no ill design—my detention would avail him nothing. And, in truth, if Harold be safe in England, Gurth must be safe in Rouen? Thy presence here at the head of our armies guarantees me from wrong. But reverse the case, and with Gurth in England, is Harold safe in Rouen? I, but a simple soldier, and homely lord, with slight influence over Edward, no command in the country, and little practised of speech in the stormy Witan,—I am just so great that William dare not harm me, but not so great that he should even wish to harm me."

"He detains our kinsmen, why not thee!" said Harold.

"Because with our kinsmen he has at least the pretext that they were pledged as hostages: because I go simply as guest and envoy. No, to me danger cannot come. Be ruled, dear Harold."

"Be ruled, O my son," cried Githa, clasping the Earl's knees, "and do not let me dread in the depth of the night to see the shade of Godwin, and hear his voice say, 'Woman, where is Harold?'"

It was impossible for the Earl's strong understanding to resist the arguments addressed to it; and, to say truth, he had been more disturbed than he liked to confess by Edward's sinister forewarnings. Yet, on the other hand, there were reasons against his acquiescence in Gurth's proposal. The primary, and, to do him justice, the strongest, was in his native courage and his generous pride. Should he for the first time in his life shrink from a peril in the discharge of his duty; a peril, too, so uncertain and vague? Should he suffer Gurth to fulfil the pledge he himself had taken? And granting even that Gurth were safe from whatever danger he individually might incur, did it become him to accept the proxy? Would Gurth's voice, too, be as potent as his own in effecting the return of the hostages?

The next reasons that swayed him were those he could not avow. In clearing his way to the English throne, it would be of no mean importance to secure the friendship of the Norman Duke, and the Norman acquiescence in his pretensions; it would be of infinite service to remove those prepossessions against his House, which were still rife with the Normans, who retained a bitter remembrance of their countrymen decimated,[1] it was said, with the concurrence if not at the order of Godwin, when they accompanied the ill-fated Alfred to the English shore, and who were yet sore with their old expulsion from the English court at the return of his father and himself.

Though it could not enter into his head that William, possessing no party whatever in England, could himself aspire to the English crown, yet at Edward's death,

[1] The word "decimated" is the one generally applied by the historians to the massacre in question; and it is therefore retained here. But it is not correctly applied, for that butchery was perpetrated, not upon one out of ten, but nine out of ten.

there might be pretenders whom the Norman arms could find ready excuse to sanction. There was the boy Atheling, on the one side, there was the valiant Norwegian King Hardrada on the other, who might revive the claims of his predecessor Magnus as heir to the rights of Canute. So near and so formidable a neighbour as the Court of the Normans, every object of policy led him to propitiate; and Gurth, with his unbending hate of all that was Norman, was not, at least, the most politic envoy he could select for that end. Add to this, that despite their present reconciliation, Harold could never long count upon amity with Tostig: and Tostig's connection with William, through their marriages into the House of Baldwin, was full of danger to a new throne, to which Tostig would probably be the most turbulent subject: the influence of this connection how desirable to counteract![1]

Nor could Harold, who, as patriot and statesman, felt deeply the necessity of reform and regeneration in the decayed edifice of the English monarchy, willingly lose an occasion to witness all that William had done to raise so high in renown and civilisation, in martial fame and commercial prosperity, that petty duchy, which he had placed on a level with the kingdoms of the Teuton and the Frank. Lastly, the Normans were the special darlings of the Roman Church. William had obtained the dispensation to his own marriage with Matilda; and might not the Norman influence, duly conciliated, back the prayer which Harold trusted one day to address to the pontiff, and secure to him the hal-

[1] The *above* reasons for Harold's memorable expedition are sketched at this length, because they suggest the most probable motives which induced it, and furnish, in no rash and inconsiderate policy, that key to his visit, which is not to be found in chronicler or historian.

lowed blessing, without which ambition lost its charm, and even a throne its splendour?

All these considerations, therefore, urged the Earl to persist in his original purpose: but a warning voice in his heart, more powerful than all, sided with the prayer of Githa, and the arguments of Gurth. In this state of irresolution, Gurth said seasonably:

"Bethink thee, Harold, if menaced but with peril to thyself, thou wouldst have a brave man's right to resist us; but it was of 'great evil to England' that Edward spoke, and thy reflection must tell thee, that in this crisis of our country, danger to thee is evil to England—evil to England thou hast no right to incur."

"Dear mother, and generous Gurth," said Harold, then joining the two in one embrace, "ye have well nigh conquered. Give me but two days to ponder well, and be assured that I will not decide from the rash promptings of an ill-considered judgment."

Farther than this they could not then move the Earl; but Gurth was pleased shortly afterwards to see him depart to Edith, whose fears, from whatever source they sprang, would, he was certain, come in aid of his own pleadings.

But as the Earl rode alone towards the once stately home of the perished Roman, and entered at twilight the darkening forest-land, his thoughts were less on Edith than on the Vala, with whom his ambition had more and more connected his soul. Perplexed by his doubts, and left dim in the waning lights of human reason, never more involuntarily did he fly to some guide to interpret the future, and decide his path.

As if fate itself responded to the cry of his heart, he suddenly came in sight of Hilda herself, gathering leaves from elm and ash amidst the woodland.

He sprang from his horse and approached her.

"Hilda," said he, in a low but firm voice, "thou hast often told me that the dead can advise the living. Raise thou the Scin-læca of the hero of old—raise the Ghost, which mine eye, or my fancy, beheld before, vast and dim by the silent bautastein, and I will stand by thy side. Fain would I know if thou hast deceived me and thyself; or if, in truth, to man's guidance Heaven doth vouchsafe saga and rede from those who have passed into the secret shores of Eternity."

"The dead," answered Hilda, "will not reveal themselves to eyes uninitiate save at their own will, uncompelled by charm and rune. To me their forms can appear distinct through the airy flame; to me, duly prepared by spells that purge the eye of the spirit, and loosen the walls of the flesh. I cannot say that what I see in the trance and the travail of my soul, thou also wilt behold; or even when the vision hath passed from my sight, and the voice from my ear, only memories, confused and dim, of what I saw and heard, remain to guide the waking and common life. But thou shalt stand by my side while I invoke the phantom, and hear and interpret the words which rush from my lips, and the runes that take meaning from the sparks of the charmed fire. I knew ere thou camest, by the darkness and trouble of Edith's soul, that some shade from the Ash-tree of Life had fallen upon thine."

Then Harold related what had passed, and placed before Hilda the doubts that beset him.

The Prophetess listened with earnest attention; but her mind, when not under its more mystic influences, being strongly biassed by its natural courage and ambition, she saw at a glance all the advantages towards securing the throne predestined to Harold, which might

be effected by his visit to the Norman court, and she held in too great disdain both the worldly sense and the mystic reveries of the monkish king (for the believer in Odin was naturally incredulous of the visitation of the Christian saints) to attach much weight to his dreary predictions.

The short reply she made was therefore not calculated to deter Harold from the expedition in dispute. But she deferred till the following night, and to wisdom more dread than her own, the counsels that should sway his decision.

With a strange satisfaction at the thought that he should, at least, test personally the reality of those assumptions of preternatural power which had of late coloured his resolves and oppressed his heart, Harold then took leave of the Vala, who returned mechanically to her employment; and, leading his horse by the reins, lowly continued his musing way towards the green knoll and its heathen ruins. But ere he gained the hillock, and while his thoughtful eyes were bent on the ground, he felt his arm seized tenderly—turned—and beheld Edith's face full of unutterable and anxious love.

With that love, indeed, there was blended so much wistfulness, so much fear, that Harold exclaimed:

"Soul of my soul, what hath chanced? what affects thee thus?"

"Hath no danger befallen thee?" asked Edith falteringly, and gazing on his face with wistful, searching eyes.

"Danger! none, sweet trembler," answered the Earl, evasively.

Edith dropped her eager looks, and clinging to his arm, drew him on silently into the forest land. She

paused at last where the old fantastic trees shut out the view of the ancient ruins; and when, looking round, she saw not those grey gigantic shafts which mortal hand seemed never to have piled together, she breathed more freely.

"Speak to me," then said Harold, bending his face to hers; "why this silence?"

"Ah, Harold!" answered his betrothed, "thou knowest that ever since we have loved one another, my existence hath been but a shadow of thine; by some weird and strange mystery, which Hilda would explain by the stars or the fates, that have made me a part of thee, I know by the lightness or gloom of my own spirit when good or ill shall befall thee. How often, in thine absence, hath a joy suddenly broke upon me; and I felt by that joy, as by the smile of a good angel, that thou hast passed safe through some peril, or triumphed over some foe! And now thou askest me why I am so sad;—I can only answer thee by saying, that the sadness is cast upon me by some thunder gloom on thine own destiny."

Harold had sought Edith to speak of his meditated journey, but seeing her dejection he did not dare; so he drew her to his breast, and chid her soothingly for her vain apprehensions. But Edith would not be comforted; there seemed something weighing on her mind and struggling to her lips, not accounted for merely by sympathetic forebodings; and at length, as he pressed her to tell all, she gathered courage and spoke:

"Do not mock me," she said, "but what secret, whether of vain folly or of meaning fate, should I hold from thee? All this day I struggled in vain against the heaviness of my forebodings. How I hailed the sight of Gurth thy brother! I besought him to seek thee—thou hast seen him."

"I have!" said Harold. "But thou wert about to tell me of something more than this dejection."

"Well," resumed Edith, "after Gurth left me, my feet sought involuntarily the hill on which we have met so often. I sate down near the old tomb, a strange weariness crept on my eyes, and a sleep that seemed not wholly sleep fell over me. I struggled against it, as if conscious of some coming terror; and as I struggled, and ere I slept, Harold,—yes, ere I slept,—I saw distinctly a pale and glimmering figure rise from the Saxon's grave. I saw—I see it still! Oh, that livid front, those glassy eyes!"

"The figure of a warrior?" said Harold, startled.

"Of a warrior, armed as in the ancient days, armed like the warrior that Hilda's maids are working for thy banner. I saw it; and in one hand it held a spear, and in the other a crown."

"A crown!—Say on, say on."

"I saw no more; sleep, in spite of myself, fell on me, a sleep full of confused and painful—rapid and shapeless images, still at last this dream rose clear. I beheld a bright and starry shape, that seemed as a spirit, yet wore thine aspect, standing on a rock; and an angry torrent rolled between the rock and the dry safe land. The waves began to invade the rock, and the spirit unfurled its wings as to flee. And then foul things climbed up from the slime of the rock, and descended from the mists of the troubled skies, and they coiled round the wings and clogged them.

"Then a voice cried in my ear,—'Seest thou not on the perilous rock the Soul of Harold the Brave?—seest thou not that the waters engulf it, if the wings fail to flee? Up, Truth, whose strength is in purity, whose image is woman, and aid the soul of the brave!' I

sought to spring to thy side; but I was powerless, and behold, close beside me, through my sleep as through a veil, appeared the shafts of the ruined temple in which I reclined. And, methought, I saw Hilda sitting alone by the Saxon's grave, and pouring from a crystal vessel black drops into a human heart which she held in her hands: and out of that heart grew a child, and out of that child a youth, with dark mournful brow. And the youth stood by thy side and whispered to thee: and from his lips there came a reeking smoke, and in that smoke as in a blight the wings withered up. And I heard the Voice say, 'Hilda, it is thou that hast destroyed the good angel, and reared from the poisoned heart the loathsome tempter! And I cried aloud, but it was too late; the waves swept over thee, and above the waves there floated an iron helmet, and on the helmet was a golden crown—the crown I had seen in the hand of the spectre!"

"But this is no evil dream, my Edith," said Harold, gaily.

Edith, unheeding him, continued:

"I started from my sleep. The sun was still high—the air lulled and windless. Then through the shafts and down the hill there glided in that clear waking daylight, a grisly shape like that which I have heard our maidens say the witch-hags, sometimes seen in the forest, assume; yet in truth, it seemed neither of man nor woman. It turned its face once towards me, and on that hideous face were the glee and hate of a triumphant fiend. Oh, Harold, what should all this portend?"

"Hast thou not asked thy kinswoman, the diviner of dreams?"

"I asked Hilda, and she, like thee, only murmured,

'The Saxon crown!' But if there be faith in those airy children of the night, surely, O adored one, the vision forebodes danger, not to life, but to soul; and the words I heard seemed to say that thy wings were thy valour, and the Fylgia thou hadst lost was,—no, *that* were impossible—"

"That my Fylgia was TRUTH, which losing, I were indeed lost to thee. Thou dost well," said Harold, loftily, "to hold *that* among the lies of the fancy. All else may, perchance, desert me, but never mine own free soul. Self-reliant hath Hilda called me in mine earlier days, and—wherever fate casts me,—in my truth, and my love, and my dauntless heart, I dare both man and the fiend."

Edith gazed a moment in devout admiration on the mien of her hero-lover, then she drew closer and closer to his breast, consoled and believing.

CHAPTER V

With all her persuasion of her own powers in penetrating the future, we have seen that Hilda had never consulted her oracles on the fate of Harold, without a dark and awful sense of the ambiguity of their responses. That fate, involving the mightiest interests of a great race, and connected with events operating on the farthest times and the remotest lands, lost itself to her prophetic ken amidst omens the most contradictory, shadows and lights the most conflicting, meshes the most entangled. Her human heart, devotedly attached to the Earl, through her love for Edith, —her pride obstinately bent on securing to the last daughter of her princely race that throne, which all her

vaticinations, even when most gloomy, assured her was destined to the man with whom Edith's doom was interwoven, combined to induce her to the most favourable interpretation of all that seemed sinister and doubtful. But according to the tenets of that peculiar form of magic cultivated by Hilda, the comprehension became obscured by whatever partook of human sympathy. It was a magic wholly distinct from the malignant witchcraft more popularly known to us, and which was equally common to the Germanic and Scandinavian heathens.

The magic of Hilda was rather akin to the old Cimbrian Alirones, or sacred prophetesses; and, as with them, it demanded the *priestess*—that is, the person without human ties or emotions, a spirit clear as a mirror, upon which the great images of destiny might be cast untroubled.

However the natural gifts and native character of Hilda might be perverted by the visionary and delusive studies habitual to her, there was in her very infirmities a grandeur, not without its pathos. In this position which she had assumed between the earth and the heaven, she stood so solitary and in such chilling air, —all the doubts that beset her lonely and daring soul came in such gigantic forms of terror and menace!— On the verge of the mighty Heathenesse sinking fast into the night of ages, she towered amidst the shades, a shade herself; and round her gathered the last demons of the Dire Belief, defying the march of their luminous foe, and concentring round their mortal priestess, the wrecks of their horrent empire over a world redeemed.

All the night that succeeded her last brief conference with Harold, the Vala wandered through the wild forest land, seeking haunts or employed in collecting

herbs, hallowed to her dubious yet solemn lore; and the last stars were receding into the cold grey skies, when, returning homeward, she beheld within the circle of the Druid temple a motionless object, stretched on the ground near the Teuton's grave; she approached, and perceived what seemed a corpse, it was so still and stiff in its repose, and the face upturned to the stars was so haggard and death-like;—a face horrible to behold; the evidence of extreme age was written on the shrivelled livid skin and the deep furrows, but the expression retained that intense malignity which belongs to a power of life that extreme age rarely knows. The garb, which was that of a remote fashion, was foul and ragged, and neither by the garb, nor by the face, was it easy to guess what was the sex of this seeming corpse. But by a strange and peculiar odour that rose from the form,[1] and a certain glistening on the face, and the lean folded hands, Hilda knew that the creature was one of those witches, esteemed of all the most deadly and abhorred, who, by the application of certain ointments, were supposed to possess the art of separating soul from body, and, leaving the last as dead, to dismiss the first to the dismal orgies of the *Sabbat*. It was a frequent custom to select for the place of such trances, heathen temples and ancient graves. And Hilda seated herself beside the witch to await the waking. The cock crowed thrice, heavy mists began to arise from the glades, covering the gnarled roots of the forest trees, when the dread face on which Hilda calmly gazed, showed symptoms of returning life! a strong convulsion shook the vague indefinite form under its huddled garments, the eyes opened, closed, —opened again; and what had a few moments before seemed a dead thing sate up and looked round.

[1] See Note (N).

"Wicca," said the Danish prophetess, with an accent between contempt and curiosity, "for what mischief to beast or man hast thou followed the noiseless path of the Dreams through the airs of Night?"

The creature gazed hard upon the questioner, from its bleared but fiery eyes, and replied slowly, "Hail, Hilda, the Morthwyrtha! why art thou not of us, why comest thou not to our revels? Gay sport have we had to-night with Faul and Zabulus;[1] but gayer far shall our sport be in the wassail hall of Senlac, when thy grandchild shall come in the torchlight to the bridal bed of her lord. A buxom bride is Edith the Fair, and fair looked her face in her sleep on yester noon, when I sate by her side, and breathed on her brow, and murmured the verse that blackens the dream; but fairer still shall she look in her sleep by her lord. Ha! ha! Ho! we shall be there, with Zabulus and Faul; we shall be there!"

"How!" said Hilda, thrilled to learn that the secret ambition she cherished was known to this loathed sister in the art. "How dost thou pretend to that mystery of the future, which is dim and clouded even to me? Canst thou tell when and where the daughter of the Norse kings shall sleep on the breast of her lord?"

A sound that partook of laughter, but was so unearthly in its malignant glee that it seemed not to come from a human lip, answered the Vala; and as the laugh died the witch rose, and said:

"Go and question thy dead, O Morthwyrtha! Thou deemest thyself wiser than we are; we wretched hags, whom the ceorl seeks when his herd has the murrain,

[1] Faul was an evil spirit much dreaded by the Saxons. Zabulus and Diabolus (the Devil) seem to have been the same.

or the girl when her false love forsakes her; we, who have no dwelling known to man, but are found at need in the wold or the cave, or the side of dull slimy streams where the murderess-mother hath drowned her babe. Askest thou, O Hilda, the rich and the learned, askest thou counsel and lore from the daughter of Faul?"

"No," answered the Vala, haughtily, "not to such as thou do the great Nornas unfold the future. What knowest thou of the runes of old, whispered by the trunkless skull to the mighty Odin? runes that control the elements, and conjure up the Shining Shadows of the grave. Not with thee will the stars confer; and thy dreams are foul with revelries obscene, not solemn and haunted with the bodements of things to come! Only I marvelled, while I beheld thee on the Saxon's grave, what joy such as thou can find in that life above life, which draws upward the soul of the true Vala."

"The joy," replied the Witch, "the joy which comes from wisdom and power, higher than you ever won with your spells from the rune or the star. Wrath gives the venom to the slaver of the dog, and death to the curse of the Witch. When wilt thou be as wise as the hag thou despisest? When will all the clouds that beset thee roll away from thy ken? When thy hopes are all crushed, when thy passions lie dead, when thy pride is abased, when thou art but a wreck, like the shafts of this temple, through which the starlight can shine. *Then* only, thy soul will see clearly the sense of the runes, and then, thou and I will meet on the verge of the Black Shoreless Sea!"

So, despite all her haughtiness and disdain, did these words startle the lofty Prophetess, that she remained gazing into space long after that fearful apparition had vanished, and up from the grass, which those obscene steps had profaned, sprang the lark carolling.

But ere the sun had dispelled the dews on the forest sward, Hilda had recovered her wonted calm, and, locked within her own secret chamber, prepared the seid and the runes for the invocation of the dead.

CHAPTER VI

Resolving, should the auguries consulted permit him to depart, to entrust Gurth with the charge of informing Edith, Harold parted from his betrothed, without hint of his suspended designs: and he passed the day in making all preparations for his absence and his journey, promising Gurth to give his final answer on the morrow,—when either himself or his brother should depart for Rouen. But more and more impressed with the arguments of Gurth, and his own sober reason, and somewhat perhaps influenced by the forebodings of Edith (for that mind, once so constitutionally firm, had become tremulously alive to such airy influences), he had almost predetermined to assent to his brother's prayer, when he departed to keep his dismal appointment with the Morthwyrtha. The night was dim, but not dark; no moon shone, but the stars, wan though frequent, gleamed pale, as from the farthest deeps of the heaven; clouds grey and fleecy rolled slowly across the welkin, veiling and disclosing, by turns, the melancholy orbs.

The Morthwyrtha, in her dark dress, stood within the circle of stones. She had already kindled a fire at the foot of the hautastein, and its glare shone redly on the grey shafts; playing through their forlorn gaps upon the sward. By her side was a vessel, seemingly of pure water, filled from the old Roman fountain, and its

clear surface flashed blood-red in the beams. Behind them, in a circle round both fire and water, were fragments of bark, cut in a peculiar form, like the head of an arrow, and inscribed with the mystic letters; nine were the fragments, and on each fragment were graved the runes. In her right hand the Morthwyrtha held her seid staff, her feet were bare, and her loins girt by the Hunnish belt inscribed with mystic letters; from the belt hung a pouch or gipsire of bearskin, with plates of silver. Her face, as Harold entered the circle, had lost its usual calm—it was wild and troubled.

She seemed unconscious of Harold's presence, and her eye fixed and rigid, was as that of one in a trance. Slowly, as if constrained by some power not her own, she began to move round the ring with a measured pace, and at last her voice broke low, hollow, and internal, into a rugged chaunt, which may be thus imperfectly translated—

"By the Urdar-fount dwelling,
Day by day from the rill,
The Nornas besprinkle
The ash Ygg-drassill,[1]
The hart bites the buds,
And the snake gnaws the root,
But the eagle all-seeing
Keeps watch on the fruit.

"These drops on thy tomb
From the fountain I pour;
With the rune I invoke thee,
With flame I restore.
Dread Father of men,
In the land of thy grave,
Give voice to the Vala,
And light to the Brave."

[1] *Ygg-drassill*, the mystic Ash-tree of Life, or symbol of the earth, watered by the Fates.—See Note (O).

As she thus chaunted, the Morthwyrtha now sprinkled the drops from the vessel over the bautastein,—now, one by one, cast the fragments of bark scrawled with runes on the fire. Then, whether or not some glutinous or other chemical material had been mingled in the water, a pale gleam broke from the gravestone thus sprinkled, and the whole tomb glistened in the light of the leaping fire. From this light a mist or thin smoke gradually rose, and took, though vaguely, the outline of a vast human form. But so indefinite was the outline to Harold's eye, that gazing on it steadily, and stilling with strong effort his loud heart, he knew not whether it was a phantom or a vapour that he beheld.

The Vala paused, leaning on her staff, and gazing in awe on the glowing stone, while the Earl, with his arms folded on his broad breast, stood hushed and motionless. The sorceress recommenced.

"Mighty dead, I revere thee,
Dim-shaped from the cloud,
With the light of thy deeds
For the web of thy shroud.

"As Odin consulted
Mimir's skull hollow-eyed,[1]
Odin's heir comes to seek
In the Phantom a guide."

As the Morthwyrtha ceased, the fire crackled loud, and from its flame flew one of the fragments of bark to the feet of the sorceress:—the runic letters all indented with sparks.

The sorceress uttered a loud cry, which, despite his

[1] Mimir, the most celebrated of the giants. The Vaner, with whom he was left as a hostage, cut off his head. Odin embalmed it by his *seid*, or magic art, pronounced over it mystic runes, and, ever after, consulted it on critical occasions.

courage and his natural strong sense, thrilled through the Earl's heart to his marrow and bones, so appalling was it with wrath and terror; and while she gazed aghast on the blazing letters, she burst forth:

"No warrior art thou,
And no child of the tomb;
I know thee, and shudder,
Great Asa of Doom.

"Thou constrainest my lips
And thou crushest my spell;
Bright Son of the Giant—
Dark Father of Hell!" [1]

The whole form of the Morthwyrtha then became convulsed and agitated, as if with the tempest of frenzy; the foam gathered to her lips, and her voice rang forth like a shriek:

"In the Iron Wood rages
The Weaver of Harm,
The giant Blood-drinker
Hag-born MANAGARM.[2]

"A keel nears the shoal;
From the slime and the mud
Crawl the newt and the adder,
The spawn of the flood.

[1] Asa-Lok or Loke—(distinct from Utgard-Lok, the demon of the Infernal Regions)—descended from the Giants, but received among the celestial Deities; a treacherous and malignant Power fond of assuming disguises and plotting evil—corresponding in his attributes with our "Lucifer." One of his progeny was Hela, the Queen of Hell.

[2] "A hag dwells in a wood called Janvid, the Iron Wood, the mother of many gigantic sons shaped like wolves; there is one of a race more fearful than all, named 'Managarm.' He will be filled with the blood of men who draw near their end, and will swallow up the moon and stain the heavens and the hearth with blood."—From the *Prose Edda*. In the Scandinavian poetry, Managarm is sometimes the symbol of *war*, and the "Iron Wood" a metaphor for *spears*.

"Thou stand'st on the rock
Where the dreamer beheld thee.
O soul, spread thy wings,
Ere the glamour hath spell'd thee.

"O, dread is the tempter,
And strong the control;
But conquer'd the tempter,
If firm be the soul!"

The Vala paused; and though it was evident that in her frenzy she was still unconscious of Harold's presence, and seemed but to be the compelled and passive voice to some Power, real or imaginary, beyond her own existence, the proud man approached, and said:

"Firm shall be my soul; nor of the dangers which beset it would I ask the dead or the living. If plain answers to mortal sense can come from these airy shadows or these mystic charms, reply, O interpreter of fate; reply but to the questions I demand. If I go to the court of the Norman, shall I return unscathed?"

The Vala stood rigid as a shape of stone while Harold thus spoke; and her voice came so low and strange as if forced from her scarce-moving lips:

"Thou shalt return unscathed."

"Shall the hostages of Godwin, my father, be released?"

"The hostages of Godwin shall be released," answered the same voice; "the hostages of Harold be retained."

"Wherefore hostage from me?"

"In pledge of alliance with the Norman."

"Ha! then the Norman and Harold shall plight friendship and troth?"

"Yes!" answered the Vala; but this time a visible shudder passed over her rigid form.

"Two questions more, and I have done. The Norman priests have the ear of the Roman Pontiff. Shall my league with William the Norman avail to win me my bride?"

"It will win thee the bride thou wouldst never have wedded but for thy league with William the Norman. Peace with thy questions, peace!" continued the voice, trembling as with some fearful struggle; "for it is the demon that forces my words, and they wither my soul to speak them."

"But one question more remains; shall I live to wear the crown of England; and if so, when shall I be a king?"

At these words the face of the Prophetess kindled, the fire suddenly leapt up higher and brighter; again, vivid sparks lighted the runes on the fragments of bark that were shot from the flame; over these last the Morthwyrtha bowed her head, and then, lifting it, triumphantly burst once more into song.

"When the Wolf Month,[1] grim and still,
Heaps the snow-mass on the hill;
When, through white air, sharp and bitter,
Mocking sunbeams freeze and glitter;
When the ice-gems, bright and barbed,
Deck the boughs the leaves had garbed,
Then the measure shall be meted,
And the circle be completed.
Cerdic's race, the Thor-descended,
In the Monk-king's tomb be ended;
And no Saxon brow but thine
Wear the crown of Woden's line.

"Where thou wendest, wend unfearing,
Every step thy throne is nearing.
Fraud may plot, and force assail thee,—
Shall the soul thou trusteth fail thee?

[1] "Wolf Month," January.

If it fail thee, scornful hearer,
Still the throne shines near and nearer.
Guile with guile oppose, and never
Crown and brow shall Force dissever:
Till the dead men unforgiving
Loose the war steeds on the living;
Till a sun whose race is ending
Sees the rival stars contending;
Where the dead men, unforgiving,
Wheel the war steeds round the living.

"Where thou wendest, wend unfearing;
Every step thy throne is nearing.
Never shall thy House decay,
Nor thy sceptre pass away,
While the Saxon name endureth
In the land thy throne secureth;
Saxon name and throne together,
Leaf and root, shall wax and wither;
So the measure shall be meted,
And the circle close completed.

"Art thou answer'd, dauntless seeker?
Go, thy bark shall ride the breaker,
Every billow high and higher,
Waft thee up to thy desire;
And a force beyond thine own,
Drift and strand thee on the throne.

"When the Wolf Month, grim and still,
Piles the snow-mass on the hill,
In the white air sharp and bitter
Shall thy kingly sceptre glitter:
When the ice-gems barb the bough
Shall the jewels clasp thy brow;
Winter-wind, the oak uprending,
With the altar-anthem blending;
Wind shall howl, and mone shall sing,
"Hail to Harold—HAIL THE KING!'"

An exultation that seemed more than human, so intense it was and so solemn,—thrilled in the voice which

thus closed predictions that seemed signally to belie the more vague and menacing warnings with which the dreary incantation had commenced. The Morthwyrtha stood erect and stately, still gazing on the pale blue flame that rose from the burial stone, still slowly the flame waned and paled, and at last died with a sudden flicker, leaving the grey tomb standing forth all weatherworn and desolate, while a wind rose from the north and sighed through the roofless columns. Then as the light over the grave expired, Hilda gave a deep sigh, and fell to the ground senseless.

Harold lifted his eyes towards the stars and murmured:

"If it be a sin, as the priests say, to pierce the dark walls which surround us here, and read the future in the dim world beyond, why gavest thou, O Heaven, the reason, ever resting, save when it explores? Why hast thou set in the heart the mystic Law of Desire, ever toiling to the High, ever grasping at the Far?"

Heaven answered not the unquiet soul. The clouds passed to and fro in their wanderings, the wind still sighed through the hollow stones, the fire shot with vain sparks towards the distant stars. In the cloud and the wind and the fire couldst thou read no answer from Heaven, unquiet soul?

The next day, with a gallant company, the falcon on his wrist,[1] the sprightly hound gamboling before his steed, blithe of heart and high in hope, Earl Harold took his way to the Norman court.

[1] Bayeux tapestry.

BOOK IX

THE BONES OF THE DEAD

CHAPTER I

William, Count of the Normans, sate in a fair chamber of his palace of Rouen; and on the large table before him were ample evidences of the various labours, as warrior, chief, thinker, and statesman, which filled the capacious breadth of that sleepless mind.

There, lay a plan of the new port of Cherbourg, and beside it an open MS. of the Duke's favourite book, the Commentaries of Cæsar, from which, it is said, he borrowed some of the tactics of his own martial science; marked, and dotted, and interlined with his large bold handwriting, were the words of the great Roman. A score or so of long arrows, which had received some skilful improvement in feather or bolt, lay carelessly scattered over some architectural sketches of a new Abbey Church, and the proposed charter for its endowment. An open cyst, of the beautiful workmanship for which the English goldsmiths were then pre-eminently renowned, that had been among the parting gifts of Edward, contained letters from the various potentates near and far, who sought his alliance or menaced his repose.

On a perch behind him sate his favourite Norway falcon unhooded, for it had been taught the finest polish in its dainty education—viz., "to face company

undisturbed." At a kind of easel at the farther end of the hall, a dwarf, misshapen in limbs, but of a face singularly acute and intelligent, was employed in the outline of that famous action at Val des Dunes, which had been the scene of one of the most brilliant of William's feats in arms—an outline intended to be transferred to the notable "stitchwork" of Matilda the Duchess.

Upon the floor, playing with a huge boar-hound of English breed, that seemed but ill to like the play, and every now and then snarled and showed his white teeth, was a young boy, with something of the Duke's features, but with an expression more open and less sagacious; and something of the Duke's broad build of chest and shoulder, but without promise of the Duke's stately stature, which was needed to give grace and dignity to a strength otherwise cumbrous and graceless. And indeed, since William's visit to England, his athletic shape had lost much of its youthful symmetry, though not yet deformed by that corpulence which was a disease almost as rare in the Norman as the Spartan.

Nevertheless, what is a defect in the gladiator is often but a beauty in the prince; and the Duke's large proportions filled the eye with a sense both of regal majesty and physical power. His countenance, yet more than his form, showed the work of time; the short dark hair was worn into partial baldness at the temples by the habitual friction of the casque, and the constant indulgence of wily stratagem and ambitious craft had deepened the wrinkles round the plotting eye and the firm mouth: so that is was only by an effort like that of an actor, that his aspect regained the knightly and noble frankness it had once worn. The accomplished prince was no longer, in truth, what the bold warrior

had been,—he was greater in state and less in soul. And already, despite all his grand qualities as a ruler, his imperious nature had betrayed signs of what he (whose constitutional sternness the Norman freemen, not without effort, curbed into the limits of justice) might become, if wider scope were afforded to his fiery passions and unsparing will.

Before the Duke, who was leaning his chin on his hand, stood Mallet de Graville, speaking earnestly, and his discourse seemed both to interest and please his lord.

"Eno'!" said William, "I comprehend the nature of the land and its men,—a land that, untaught by experience, and persuaded that a peace of twenty or thirty years must last till the crack of doom, neglects all its defences, and has not one fort, save Dover, between the coast and the capital,—a land which must be won or lost by a single battle, and men (here the Duke hesitated,) and *men*," he resumed with a sigh, "whom it will be so hard to conquer that, *pardex*, I don't wonder they neglect their fortresses. Enough I say, of them. Let us return to Harold,—thou thinkest, then, that he is worthy of his fame?"

"He is almost the only Englishman I have seen," answered De Graville, "who hath received scholarly rearing and nurture; and all his faculties are so evenly balanced, and all accompanied by so composed a calm, that methinks, when I look at and hear him, I contemplate some artful castle,—the strength of which can never be known at the first glance, nor except by those who assail it."

"Thou art mistaken, Sire de Graville," said the Duke, with a shrewd and cunning twinkle of his luminous dark eyes. "For thou tellest me that he hath

no thought of my pretensions to the English throne,—that he inclines willingly to thy suggestions to come himself to my court for the hostages,—that, in a word, he is not suspicious."

"Certes, he is not suspicious," returned Mallet.

"And thinkest thou that an artful castle were worth much without warder or sentry,—or a cultivated mind strong and safe, without its watchman,—Suspicion?"

"Truly, my lord speaks well and wisely," said the knight, startled; "but Harold is a man thoroughly English, and the English are a *gens* the least suspecting of any created thing between an angel and a sheep."

William laughed aloud. But his laugh was checked suddenly; for at that moment a fierce yell smote his ears, and looking hastily up, he saw his hound and his son rolling together on the ground, in a grapple that seemed deadly.

William sprang to the spot; but the boy, who was then under the dog, cried out, "*Laissez aller! Laissez aller!* no rescue! I will master my own foe;" and, so saying, with a vigorous effort he gained his knee, and with both hands griped the hound's throat, so that the beast twisted in vain, to and fro, with gnashing jaws, and in another minute would have panted out its last.

"I may save my good hound now," said William, with the gay smile of his earlier days, and, though not without some exertion of his prodigious strength, he drew the dog from his son's grasp.

"That was ill done, father," said Robert, surnamed even then the *Courthose*, "to take part with thy son's foe."

"But my son's foe is thy father's property, my

vaillant," said the Duke; "and thou must answer to me for treason in provoking quarrel and feud with my own fourfooted vavasour."

"It is not thy property, father; thou gavest the dog to me when a whelp."

"Fables, *Monseigneur de Courthose;* I lent it to thee but for a day, when thou hadst put out thine ankle bone in jumping off the rampire; and all maimed as thou wert, thou hadst still malice enow in thee to worry the poor beast into a fever."

"Give or lent, it is the same thing, father: what I have once, that will I hold, as thou didst before me, in thy cradle."

Then the great Duke, who in his own house was the fondest and weakest of men, was so doltish and doting as to take the boy in his arms and kiss him, nor, with all his farsighted sagacity, deemed he that in that kiss lay the seed of the awful curse that grew up from a father's agony, to end in a son's misery and perdition.

Even Mallet de Graville frowned at the sight of the sire's infirmity,—even Turold the dwarf shook his head. At that moment an officer entered, and announced that an English nobleman, apparently in great haste (for his horse had dropped down dead as he dismounted), had arrived at the palace, and craved instant audience of the Duke. William put down the boy, gave the brief order for the stranger's admission, and, punctilious in ceremonial, beckoning De Graville to follow him, passed at once into the next chamber, and seated himself on his chair of state.

In a few moments one of the seneschals of the palace ushered in a visitor, whose long moustache at once proclaimed him Saxon, and in whom De Graville with surprise recognised his old friend, Godrith. The

young thegn, with a reverence more hasty than that to which William was accustomed, advanced to the foot of the daïs, and, using the Norman language, said, in a voice thick with emotion:

"From Harold the Earl, greeting to thee, *Monseigneur*. Most foul and unchristian wrong hath been done the Earl, by thy liegeman, Guy, Count of Ponthieu. Sailing hither in two barks from England, with intent to visit thy court, storm and wind drove the Earl's vessels towards the mouth of the Somme;[1] there landing, and without fear, as in no hostile country, he and his train were seized by the Count himself, and cast into prison in the castle of Belrem.[2] A dungeon fit but for malefactors holds, while I speak, the first lord of England, and brother-in-law to its king. Nay, hints of famine, torture, and death itself, have been darkly thrown out by this most disloyal count, whether in earnest, or with the base view of heightening ransom. At length, wearied perhaps by the Earl's firmness and disdain, this traitor of Ponthieu hath permitted me in the Earl's behalf to bear the message of Harold. He came to thee as to a prince and a friend; sufferest thou thy liegeman, to detain him as a thief or a foe?"

"Noble Englishman," replied William, gravely, "this is a matter more out of my cognisance than thou seemest to think. It is true that Guy, Count of Ponthieu, holds fief under me, but I have no control over the laws of his realm. And by those laws, he hath right of life and death over all stranded and waifed on his coast. Much grieve I for the mishap of your famous Earl, and what I can do, I will; but I can only treat in this matter with Guy as prince with

[1] Roman de Rou, see part ii. 1078.
[2] *Belrem*, the present Beaurain, near Montreuil.

prince, not as lord to vassal. Meanwhile I pray you to take rest and food; and I will seek prompt counsel as to the measures to adopt."

The Saxon's face showed disappointment and dismay at this answer, so different from what he had expected; and he replied with the natural honest bluntness which all his younger affection of Norman manners had never eradicated:

"Food will I not touch, nor wine drink, till thou, Lord Count, hast decided what help, as noble to noble, Christian to Christian, man to man, thou givest to him who has come into this peril solely from his trust in thee."

"Alas!" said the grand dissimulator, "heavy is the responsibility with which thine ignorance of our land, laws, and men would charge me. If I take but one false step in this matter, woe indeed to thy lord! Guy is hot and haughty, and in his *droits;* he is capable of sending me the Earl's head in reply to too dure a request for his freedom. Much treasure and broad lands will it cost me, I fear, to ransom the Earl. But be cheered; half my duchy were not too high a price for thy lord's safety. Go, then, and eat with a good heart, and drink to the Earl's health with a hopeful prayer."

"And it please you, my lord," said De Graville, "I know this gentle thegn, and will beg of you the grace to see to his entertainment, and sustain his spirits."

"Thou shalt, but later; so noble a guest none but my chief seneschal should be the first to honour." Then turning to the officer in waiting, he bade him lead the Saxon to the chamber tenanted by William Fitzosborne (who then lodged within the palace), and committed him to that Count's care.

As the Saxon sullenly withdrew, and as the door

closed on him, William rose and strode to and fro the room exultingly.

"I have him! I have him!" he cried aloud; not as free guest, but as ransomed captive. I have him—the Earl!—I have him! Go, Mallet, my friend, now seek this sour-looking Englishman; and, hark thee! fill his ear with all the tales thou canst think of as to Guy's cruelty and ire. Enforce all the difficulties that lie in my way towards the Earl's delivery. Great make the danger of the Earl's capture, and vast all the favour of release. Comprehendest thou?"

"I am Norman, *Monseigneur*," replied De Graville, with a slight smile; "and we Normans can make a short mantle cover a large space. You will not be displeased with my address."

"Go then—go," said William, "and send me forthwith—Lanfranc—no, hold—not Lanfranc, he is too scrupulous; Fitzosborne—no, too haughty. Go, first, to my brother, Odo of Bayeux, and pray him to seek me on the instant."

The knight bowed and vanished, and William continued to pace the room, with sparkling eyes and murmuring lips.

CHAPTER II

Not till after repeated messages, at first without talk of ransom and in high tone, affected, no doubt, by William to spin out the negotiations, and augment the value of his services, did Guy of Ponthieu consent to release his illustrious captive,—the guerdon, a large sum and *un bel maneir* [1] on the river Eaulne. But whether that guerdon were the fair ransom fee, or the price for

[1] Roman de Rou, part ii. 1079.

concerted snare, no man now can say, and sharper than ours the wit that forms the more likely guess. These stipulations effected, Guy himself opened the doors of the dungeon; and affecting to treat the whole matter as one of law and right, now happily and fairly settled, was as courteous and debonair as he had before been dark and menacing.

He even himself, with a brilliant train, accompanied Harold to the *Chateau d'Eu*,[1] whither William journeyed to give him the meeting; and laughed with a gay grace at the Earl's short and scornful replies to his compliments and excuses. At the gates of this chateau, not famous, in after times, for the good faith of its lords, William himself, laying aside all the pride of etiquette which he had established at his court, came to receive his visitor; and aiding him to dismount embraced him cordially, amidst a loud fanfaron of fifes and trumpets.

The flower of that glorious nobility, which a few generations had sufficed to rear out of the lawless pirates of the Baltic, had been selected to do honour alike to guest and host.

There were Hugo de Montfort and Roger de Beaumont, famous in council as in the field, and already grey with fame. There was Henri, Sire de Ferrers, whose name is supposed to have arisen from the vast forges that burned around his castle, on the anvils of which were welded the arms impenetrable in every field. There was Raoul de Tancarville, the old tutor of William, hereditary Chamberlain of the Norman Counts; and Geoffroi de Mandeville, and Tonstain the Fair, whose name still preserved, amidst the general corruption of appellations, the evidence of his Danish birth; and Hugo de Grantmesnil, lately returned from exile; and Humphrey de Bohun, whose old castle in

[1] William of Poitiers, "apud Aucense Castrum."

Carcutan may yet be seen; and St. John, and Lacie, and D'Aincourt, of broad lands between the Maine and the Oise; and William de Montfichet, and Roger, nicknamed "Bigod," and Roger de Mortemer; and many more, whose fame lives in another land than that of Neustria! There, too, were the chief prelates and abbots of a church that since William's accession had risen into repute with Rome and with Learning, unequalled on this side the Alps; their white aubes over their gorgeous robes; Lanfranc, and the Bishop of Coutance, and the Abbot of Bec, and foremost of all in rank, but not in learning, Odo of Bayeux.

So great the assemblage of Quens and prelates, that there was small room in the courtyard for the lesser knights and chiefs, who yet hustled each other, with loss of Norman dignity, for a sight of the lion which guarded England. And still, amidst all those men of mark and might, Harold, simple and calm, looked as he had looked on his war-ship in the Thames, the man who could lead them all!

From those, indeed, who were fortunate enough to see him as he passed up by the side of William, as tall as the Duke, and no less erect—of far slighter bulk, but with a strength almost equal, to a practised eye, in his compacter symmetry and more supple grace,—from those who saw him thus, an admiring murmur rose; for no men in the world so valued and cultivated personal advantages as the Norman knighthood.

Conversing easily with Harold, and well watching him while he conversed, the Duke led his guest into a private chamber in the third floor [1] of the castle, and in that chamber were Haco and Wolnoth.

[1] As soon as the rude fort of the middle ages admitted something of magnificence and display, the state rooms were placed in the third story of the inner court, as being the most secure.

"This, I trust, is no surprise to you," said the Duke, smiling; "and now I shall but mar your commune." So saying, he left the room, and Wolnoth rushed to his brother's arms, while Haco, more timidly, drew near and touched the Earl's robe.

As soon as the first joy of the meeting was over, the Earl said to Haco, whom he had drawn to his breast with an embrace as fond as that bestowed on Wolnoth:

"Remembering thee a boy, I came to say to thee, 'Be my son;' but seeing thee a man, I change the prayer;—supply thy father's place, and be my brother! And thou, Wolnoth, hast thou kept thy word to me? Norman is thy garb, in truth; is thy heart still English?"

"Hist!" whispered Haco; "hist! We have a proverb, that walls have ears."

"But Norman walls can hardly understand our broad Saxon of Kent, I trust," said Harold, smiling, though with a shade on his brow.

"True; continue to speak Saxon," said Haco, "and we are safe."

"Safe!" echoed Harold.

"Haco's fears are childish, my brother," said Wolnoth, "and he wrongs the Duke."

"Not the Duke, but the policy which surrounds him like an atmosphere," exclaimed Haco. "Oh, Harold, generous indeed wert thou to come hither for thy kinsfolk—generous! But for England's weal, better that we had rotted out our lives in exile, ere thou, hope and prop of England, set foot in these webs of wile."

"Tut!" said Wolnoth, impatiently; "good is it for England that the Norman and Saxon should be friends."

Harold, who had lived to grow as wise in men's

nearts as his father, save when the natural trustfulness that lay under his calm reserve lulled his sagacity, turned his eye steadily on the faces of his two kinsmen; and he saw at the first glance that a deeper intellect and a graver temper than Wolnoth's fair face betrayed characterised the dark eye and serious brow of Haco. He therefore drew his nephew a little aside, and said to him:

"Forewarned is forearmed. Deemest thou that this fair-spoken Duke will dare aught against my life?"

"Life, no; liberty, yes."

Harold startled, and those strong passions native to his breast, but usually curbed beneath his majestic will, heaved in his bosom and flashed in his eye.

"Liberty!—let him dare! Though all his troops paved the way from his court to his coasts, I would hew my way through their ranks."

"Deemest thou that I am a coward?" said Haco, simply, "yet contrary to all law and justice, and against King Edward's well-known remonstrance, hath not the Count detained me years, yea, long years, in his land? Kind are his words, wily his deeds. Fear not force; fear fraud."

"I fear neither," answered Harold, drawing himself up, "nor do I repent me one moment—No! nor did I repent in the dungeon of that felon Count, whom God grant me life to repay with fire and sword for his treason—that I myself have come hither to demand my kinsmen. I come in the name of England, strong in her might, and sacred in her majesty."

Before Haco could reply, the door opened, and Raoul de Tancarville, as Grand Chamberlain, entered, with all Harold's Saxon train, and a goodly number of Norman squires and attendants, bearing rich vestures.

The noble bowed to the Earl with his country's polished courtesy, and besought leave to lead him to the bath, while his own squires prepared his raiment for the banquet to be held in his honour. So all further conference with his young kinsmen was then suspended.

The Duke, who affected a state no less regal than that of the Court of France, permitted no one, save his own family and guests, to sit at his own table. His great officers (those imperious lords) stood beside his chair; and William Fitzosborne, "the Proud Spirit," placed on the board with his own hand the dainty dishes for which the Norman cooks were renowned. And great men were those Norman cooks; and often for some "delicate," more ravishing than wont, gold chain and gem, and even "*bel manoir*," fell to their guerdon.[1] It was worth being a cook in those days!

The most seductive of men was William in his fair moods; and he lavished all the witcheries at his control upon his guest. If possible, yet more gracious was Matilda the Duchess. This woman, eminent for mental culture, for personal beauty, and for a spirit and ambition no less great than her lord's, knew well how to choose such subjects of discourse as might most flatter an English ear. Her connection with Harold, through her sister's marriage with Tostig, warranted a familiarity almost caressing, which she assumed towards the comely Earl; and she insisted, with a winning smile, that all the hours the Duke would leave at his disposal he must spend with her.

The banquet was enlivened by the song of the great

[1] A manor (but not, alas! in Normandy) was held by one of his cooks, on the tenure of supplying William with a dish of dillegrout.

Taillefer himself, who selected a theme that artfully flattered alike the Norman and the Saxon; viz., the aid given by Rolfganger to Athelstan, and the alliance between the English King and the Norman founder. He dexterously introduced into the song praises of the English, and the value of their friendship; and the Countess significantly applauded each gallant compliment to the land of the famous guest. If Harold was pleased by such poetic courtesies, he was yet more surprised by the high honour in which Duke, baron, and prelate evidently held the Poet: for it was among the worst signs of that sordid spirit, honouring only wealth, which had crept over the original character of the Anglo-Saxon, that the bard or scop, with them, had sunk into great disrepute, and it was even forbidden to ecclesiastics [1] to admit such landless vagrants to their company.

Much, indeed, there was in that court which, even on the first day, Harold saw to admire—that stately temperance, so foreign to English excesses, (but which, alas! the Norman kept not long when removed to another soil)—that methodical state and noble pomp which characterised the Feudal system, linking so harmoniously prince to peer, and peer to knight—the easy grace, the polished wit of the courtiers—the wisdom of Lanfranc, and the higher ecclesiastics, blending worldly lore with decorous, not pedantic, regard to their sacred calling—the enlightened love of music, letters, song, and art, which coloured the discourse both of Duke and Duchess and the younger courtiers, prone to emulate high example, whether for ill or good—all impressed Harold with a sense of civilisation and true

[1] The Council of Cloveshoe forbade the clergy to harbour poets, harpers, musicians, and buffoons.

royalty, which at once saddened and inspired his musing mind—saddened him when he thought how far behind-hand England was in much, with this comparatively petty principality—inspired him when he felt what one great chief can do for his native land.

The unfavourable impressions made upon his thoughts by Haco's warnings could scarcely fail to yield beneath the prodigal courtesies lavished upon him, and the frank openness with which William laughingly excused himself for having so long detained the hostages, "in order, my guest, to make thee come and fetch them. And, by St. Valery, now thou art here, thou shalt not depart, till, at least, thou hast lost in gentler memories the recollection of the scurvy treatment thou hast met from that barbarous Count. Nay, never bite thy lip, Harold, my friend, leave to me thy revenge upon Guy. Sooner or later, the very *maneir* he hath extorted from me shall give excuse for sword and lance, and then, *pardex*, thou shalt come and cross steel in thine own quarrel. How I rejoice that I can show to the *beau frère* of my dear cousin and seigneur some return for all the courtesies the English King and kingdom bestowed upon me! To-morrow we will ride to Rouen; there, all knightly sports shall be held to grace thy coming; and by St. Michael, knight-saint of the Norman, nought less will content me than to have thy great name in the list of my chosen *chevaliers*. But the night wears now, and thou sure must need sleep;" and, thus talking, the Duke himself led the way to Harold's chamber, and insisted on removing the *ouche* from his robe of state. As he did so, he passed his hand, as if carelessly, along the Earl's right arm. "Ha!" said he suddenly, and in his natural tone of voice, which was

short and quick, "these muscles have known practice! Dost think thou couldst bend my bow!"

"Who could bend that of—Ulysses?" returned the Earl, fixing his deep blue eye upon the Norman's. William unconsciously changed colour, for he felt that he was at that moment more Ulysses than Achilles.

CHAPTER III

Side by side, William and Harold entered the fair city of Rouen, and there, a succession of the brilliant pageants and knightly entertainments, (comprising those "rare feats of honour," expanded, with the following age, into the more gorgeous display of joust and tourney,) was designed to dazzle the eyes and captivate the fancy of the Earl. But though Harold won, even by the confession of the chronicles most in favour of the Norman, golden opinions in a court more ready to deride than admire the Saxon,—though not only the "strength of his body," and "the boldness of his spirit," as shown in exhibitions unfamiliar to Saxon warriors, but his "manners," his "eloquence, intellect, and other good qualities,"[1] were loftily conspicuous amidst those knightly courtiers, that sublime part of his character, which was found in his simple manhood and intense nationality, kept him unmoved and serene amidst all intended to exercise that fatal spell which Normanised most of those who came within the circle of Norman attraction.

These festivities were relieved by pompous excursions and progresses from town to town, and fort to fort, throughout the Duchy, and, according to some authorities, even to a visit to Philip the French King

[1] Ord. Vital.

at Compiegne. On the return to Rouen, Harold and the six thegns of his train were solemnly admitted into that peculiar band of warlike brothers which William had instituted, and to which, following the chronicles of the after century, we have given the name of *Knights*. The silver baldrick was belted on, and the lance, with its pointed banderol, was placed in the hand, and the seven Saxon lords became Norman knights.

The evening after this ceremonial, Harold was with the Duchess and her fair daughters—all children. The beauty of one of the girls drew from him those compliments so sweet to a mother's ear. Matilda looked up from the broidery on which she was engaged, and beckoned to her the child thus praised.

"Adeliza," she said, placing her hand on the girl's dark locks, "though we would not that thou shouldst learn too early how men's tongues can gloze and flatter, yet this noble guest hath so high a repute for truth, that thou mayest at least believe him sincere when he says thy face is fair. Think of it, and with pride, my child; let it keep thee through youth proof against the homage of meaner men; and, peradventure, St. Michael and St. Valery may bestow on thee a mate valiant and comely as this noble lord."

The child blushed to her brow; but answered with the quickness of a spoiled infant—unless, perhaps, she had been previously tutored so to reply: "Sweet mother, I will have no mate and no lord but Harold himself; and if he will not have Adeliza as his wife, she will die a nun."

"Froward child, it is not for thee to woo!" said Matilda, smiling. "Thou heardst her, noble Harold: what is thine answer?"

"That she will grow wiser," said the Earl, laugh-

ing, as he kissed the child's forehead. "Fair damsel, ere thou art ripe for the altar, time will have sown grey in these locks; and thou wouldst smile indeed in scorn, if Harold then claimed thy troth."

"Not so," said Matilda, seriously; "Highborn damsels see youth not in years but in fame—Fame, which is young for ever!"

Startled by the gravity with which Matilda spoke, as if to give importance to what had seemed a jest, the Earl, versed in courts, felt that a snare was round him; and replied in a tone between jest and earnest: "Happy am I to wear on my heart a charm, proof against all the beauty even of this court."

Matilda's face darkened; and William entering at that time with his usual abruptness, lord and lady exchanged glances, not unobserved by Harold.

The Duke, however, drew aside the Saxon; and saying gaily, "We Normans are not naturally jealous; but then, till now, we have not had Saxon gallants closeted with our wives;" added more seriously, "Harold, I have a grace to pray at thy hands—come with me."

The Earl followed William into his chamber, which he found filled with chiefs, in high converse; and William then hastened to inform him that he was about to make a military expedition against the Bretons; and knowing his peculiar acquaintance with the warfare, as with the language and manners, of their kindred Welch, he besought his aid in a campaign which he promised him should be brief.

Perhaps the Earl was not, in his own mind, averse from returning William's display of power by some evidence of his own military skill, and the valour of the Saxon thegns in his train. There might be pru-

dence in such exhibition, and, at all events, he could not with a good grace decline the proposal. He enchanted William therefore by a simple acquiescence; and the rest of the evening—deep into night—was spent in examining charts of the fort and country intended to be attacked.

The conduct and courage of Harold and his Saxons in this expedition are recorded by the Norman chroniclers. The Earl's personal exertions saved, at the passage of Coësnon, a detachment of soldiers, who would otherwise have perished in the quicksands; and even the warlike skill of William, in the brief and brilliant campaign, was, if not eclipsed, certainly equalled, by that of the Saxon chief.

While the campaign lasted, William and Harold had but one table and one tent. To outward appearance, the familiarity between the two was that of brothers; in reality, however, these two men, both so able—one so deep in his guile, the other so wise in his tranquil caution—felt that a silent war between the two for mastery was working on, under the guise of loving peace.

Already Harold was conscious that the politic motives for his mission had failed him; already he perceived, though he scarce knew why, that William the Norman was the last man to whom he could confide his ambition, or trust for aid.

One day, as, during a short truce with the defenders of the place they were besieging, the Normans were diverting their leisure with martial games, in which Taillefer shone pre-eminent: while Harold and William stood without their tent, watching the animated field, the Duke abruptly exclaimed to Mallet de Graville, "Bring me my bow. Now, Harold, let me see if thou canst bend it."

The bow was brought, and Saxon and Norman gathered round the spot.

"Fasten thy glove to yonder tree, Mallet," said the Duke, taking that mighty bow in his hand, and bending its stubborn yew into the noose of the string with practised ease.

Then he drew the arc to his ear; and the tree itself seemed to shake at the shock, as the shaft, piercing the glove, lodged half-way in the trunk.

"Such are not our weapons," said the Earl; "and ill would it become me, unpractised, so to peril our English honour, as to strive against the arm that could bend that arc and wing that arrow. But, that I may show these Norman knights, that at least we have some weapon wherewith we can parry shaft and smite assailer,—bring me forth, Godrith, my shield and my Danish axe."

Taking the shield and axe which the Saxon brought to him, Harold then stationed himself before the tree.

"Now, fair Duke," said he, smiling, "choose thou thy longest shaft—bid thy ten doughtiest archers take their bows; round this tree will I move, and let each shaft be aimed at whatever space in my mailless body I leave unguarded by my shield."

"No!" said William, hastily; "that were murder."

"It is but the common peril of war," said Harold, simply; and he walked to the tree.

The blood mounted to William's brow, and the lion's thirst of carnage parched his throat.

"An he will have it so," said he, beckoning to his archers; "let not Normandy be shamed. Watch well, and let every shaft go home; avoid only the head and the heart; such orgulous vaunting is best cured by blood-letting."

The archers nodded, and took their post, each at a separate quarter; and deadly indeed seemed the danger of the Earl, for as he moved, though he kept his back guarded by the tree, some parts of his form the shield left exposed, and it would have been impossible, in his quick-shifting movements, for the archers so to aim as to wound, but to spare life; yet the Earl seemed to take no peculiar care to avoid the peril; lifting his bare head fearlessly above the shield, and including in one gaze of his steadfast eye, calmly bright even at the distance, all the shafts of the archers.

At one moment five of the arrows hissed through the air, and with such wonderful quickness had the shield turned to each, that three fell to the ground blunted against it, and two broke on its surface.

But William, waiting for the first discharge, and seeing full mark at Harold's shoulder as the buckler turned, now sent forth his terrible shaft. The noble Taillefer with a poet's true sympathy cried, "Saxon, beware!" but the watchful Saxon needed not the warning. As if in disdain, Harold met not the shaft with his shield, but swinging high the mighty axe, (which with most men required both arms to wield it,) he advanced a step, and clove the rushing arrow in twain.

Before William's loud oath of wrath and surprise left his lips, the five shafts of the remaining archers fell as vainly as their predecessors against the nimble shield.

Then advancing, Harold said, cheerfully: "This is but defence, fair Duke—and little worth were the axe if it could not smite as well as ward. Wherefore, I pray you, place upon yonder broken stone pillar, which seems some relic of Druid heathenesse, such

helm and shirt of mail as thou deemest most proof against sword and pertuizan, and judge then if our English axe can guard well our English land."

"If thy axe can cleave the helmet I wore at Bavent, when the Franks and their King fled before me," said the Duke, grimly, "I shall hold Cæsar in fault, not to have invented a weapon so dread."

And striding back into his pavilion, he came forth with the helm and shirt of mail, which was worn stronger and heavier by the Normans, as fighting usually on horseback, than by Dane and Saxon, who, mainly fighting on foot, could not have endured so cumbrous a burthen: and if strong and dour generally with the Norman, judge what solid weight that mighty Duke could endure! With his own hand William placed the mail on the ruined Druid stone, and on the mail the helm.

Harold looked long and gravely at the edge of the axe; it was so richly gilt and damasquined, that the sharpness of its temper could not well have been divined under that holiday glitter. But this axe had come to him from Canute the Great, who himself, unlike the Danes, small and slight,[1] had supplied his deficiency of muscle by the finest dexterity and the most perfect weapons. Famous had been that axe in the delicate hand of Canute—how much more tremendous in the ample grasp of Harold! Swinging now in both hands this weapon, with a peculiar and rapid whirl, which gave it an inconceivable impetus, the Earl let fall the crushing blow: at the first stroke, cut right in the centre, rolled the helm; at the second, through all the woven mail (cleft asunder, as if the

[1] Canute made his inferior strength and stature his excuse for not meeting Edward Ironsides in single combat.

slightest filigree work of the goldsmith,) shore the blade, and a great fragment of the stone itself came tumbling on the sod.

The Normans stood aghast, and William's face was as pale as the shattered stone. The great Duke felt even his matchless dissimulation fail him; nor, unused to the special practice and craft which the axe required, could he have pretended, despite a physical strength superior even to Harold's, to rival blows that seemed to him more than mortal.

"Lives there any other man in the wide world whose arm could have wrought that feat?" exclaimed Bruse, the ancestor of the famous Scot.

"Nay," said Harold, simply, "at least thirty thousand such men have I left at home! But this was but the stroke of an idle vanity, and strength becomes tenfold in a good cause."

The Duke heard, and fearful lest he should betray his sense of the latent meaning couched under his guest's words, he hastily muttered forth reluctant compliment and praise; while Fitzosborne, De Bohun, and other chiefs more genuinely knightly, gave way to unrestrained admiration.

Then beckoning De Graville to follow him, the Duke strode off towards the tent of his brother of Bayeux, who, though, except on extraordinary occasions, he did not join in positive conflict, usually accompanied William in his military excursions, both to bless the host, and to advise (for his martial science was considerable) the council of war.

The bishop, who, despite the sanctimony of the Court, and his own stern nature, was (though secretly and decorously) a gallant of great success in other

fields than those of Mars,[1] sate alone in his pavilion, inditing an epistle to a certain fair dame in Rouen, whom he had unwillingly left to follow his brother. At the entrance of William, whose morals in such matters were pure and rigid, he swept the letter into the chest of relics which always accompanied him, and rose, saying, indifferently:

"A treatise on the authenticity of St. Thomas's little finger! But what ails you? you are disturbed!"

"Odo, Odo, this man baffles me—this man fools me; I make no ground with him. I have spent—heaven knows what I have spent," said the Duke, sighing with penitent parsimony, "in banquets, and ceremonies, and processions; to say nothing of my *bel maneir* of Yonne, and the sum wrung from my coffers by that greedy Ponthevin. All gone—all wasted—all melted like snow! and the Saxon is as Saxon as if he had seen neither Norman splendour, nor been released from the danger by Norman treasure. But, by the splendour Divine, I were fool indeed if I suffered him to return home. Would thou hadst seen the sorcerer cleave my helmet and mail just now, as easily as if they had been willow twigs. Oh, Odo, Odo, my soul is troubled, and St. Michael forsakes me!"

While William ran on thus distractedly, the prelate lifted his eyes inquiringly to De Graville, who now stood within the tent, and the knight briefly related the recent trial of strength.

"I see nought in this to chafe thee," said Odo; "the

[1] Odo's licentiousness was, at a later period, one of the alleged causes of his downfall, or rather against his release from the prison to which he had been consigned. He had a son named John, who distinguished himself under Henry I.—Ord. Vital. lib. iv.

man once thine, the stronger the vassal, the more powerful the lord."

"But he is not mine; I have sounded him as far as I dare go. Matilda hath almost openly offered him my fairest child as his wife. Nothing dazzles, nothing moves him. Thinkest thou I care for his strong arm? Tut, no: I chafe at the proud heart that set the arm in motion; the proud meaning his words symbolled out, 'So will English strength guard English land from the Norman—so axe and shield will defy your mail and your shafts.' But let him beware!" growled the Duke, fiercely, "or——"

"May I speak," interrupted De Graville, "and suggest a counsel?"

"Speak out, in God's name!" cried the Duke.

"Then I should say, with submission, that the way to tame a lion is not by gorging him, but daunting. Bold is the lion against open foes; but a lion in the toils loses his nature. Just now, my lord said that Harold should not return to his native land——"

"Nor shall he, but as my sworn man!" exclaimed the Duke.

"And if you now put to him that choice, think you it will favour your views? Will he not reject your proffers, and with hot scorn?"

"Scorn! darest thou that word to me?" cried the Duke. "Scorn! have I no headsman whose axe is as sharp as Harold's? and the neck of a captive is not sheathed in my Norman mail."

"Pardon, pardon, my liege," said Mallet, with spirit; "but to save my chief from a hasty action that might bring long remorse, I spoke thus boldly. Give the Earl at least fair warning:—a prison, or fealty to thee, that is the choice before him!—let him know it;

let him see that thy dungeons are dark, and thy walls impassable. Threaten not his life—brave men care not for that!—threaten thyself nought, but let others work upon him with fear of his freedom. I know well these Saxish men; I know well Harold; freedom is their passion, they are cowards when threatened with the doom of four walls."[1]

"I conceive thee, wise son," exclaimed Odo.

"Ha!" said the Duke, slowly; "and yet it was to prevent such suspicion that I took care, after the first meeting, to separate him from Haco and Wolnoth, for they must have learned much in Norman gossip, ill to repeat to the Saxon."

"Wolnoth is almost wholly Norman," said the bishop, smiling; "Wolnoth is bound *par-amours*, to a certain fair Norman dame; and, I trow well, prefers her charms here to the thought of his return. But Haco, as thou knowest, is sullen and watchful."

"So much the better companion for Harold now," said De Graville.

"I am fated ever to plot and to scheme!" said the Duke, groaning, as if he had been the simplest of men; "but, nathless, I love the stout Earl, and I mean all for his own good,—that is, compatibly with my rights and claims to the heritage of Edward my cousin."

"Of course," said the bishop.

[1] William of Poitiers, the contemporary Norman chronicler, says of Harold, that he was a man to whom imprisonment was more odious than shipwreck.

CHAPTER IV

The snares now spread for Harold were in pursuance of the policy thus resolved on. The camp soon afterwards broke up, and the troops took their way to Bayeux. William, without greatly altering his manner towards the Earl, evaded markedly (or as markedly replied not to) Harold's plain declarations, that his presence was required in England, and that he could no longer defer his departure; while, under pretence of being busied with affairs, he absented himself much from the Earl's company, or refrained from seeing him alone, and suffered Mallet de Graville, and Odo the bishop, to supply his place with Harold. The Earl's suspicions now became thoroughly aroused, and these were fed both by the hints, kindly meant, of De Graville, and the less covert discourse of the prelate: while Mallet let drop, as in gossiping illustration of William's fierce and vindictive nature, many anecdotes of that cruelty which really stained the Norman's character, Odo, more bluntly, appeared to take it for granted that Harold's sojourn in the land would be long.

"You will have time," said he, one day, as they rode together, "to assist me, I trust, in learning the language of our forefathers. Danish is still spoken much at Bayeux, the sole place in Neustria[1] where the old tongue and customs still linger; and it would

[1] In the environs of Bayeux still may perhaps linger the sole remains of the Scandinavian Normans, apart from the gentry. For centuries the inhabitants of Bayeux and its vicinity were a class distinct from the Franco-Normans, or the rest of Neustria; they submitted with great reluctance to the ducal authority, and retained their old heathen cry of Thor-aide, instead of Dieu-aide!

serve my pastoral ministry to receive your lessons; in a year or so I might hope so to profit by them as to discourse freely with the less Frankish part of my flock."

"Surely, Lord Bishop, you jest," said Harold, seriously; "you know well that within a week, at farthest, I must sail back for England with my young kinsmen."

The prelate laughed.

"I advise you, dear count and son, to be cautious how you speak so plainly to William. I perceive that you have already ruffled him by such indiscreet remarks; and you must have seen eno' of the Duke to know that, when his ire is up, his answers are short but his arms are long."

"You most grievously wrong Duke William," cried Harold, indignantly, "to suppose, merely in that playful humour, for which ye Normans are famous, that he could lay force on his confiding guest?"

"No, not a confiding guest,—a ransomed captive. Surely my brother will deem that he has purchased of Count Guy his rights over his illustrious prisoner. But courage! The Norman Court is not the Ponthevin dungeon; and your chains, at least, are roses."

The reply of wrath and defiance that rose to Harold's lip, was checked by a sign from De Graville, who raised his finger to his lip with a face expressive of caution and alarm; and, some little time after, as they halted to water their horses, De Graville came up to him and said in a low voice, and in Saxon:

"Beware how you speak too frankly to Odo. What is said to him is said to William; and the Duke, at times, so acts on the spur of the moment that— But let me not wrong him, or needlessly alarm you."

"Sire de Graville," said Harold, "this is not the

first time that the Prelate of Bayeux hath hinted at compulsion, nor that you (no doubt kindly) have warned me of purpose hostile or fraudful. As plain man to plain man, I ask you, on your knightly honour, to tell me if you know aught to make you believe that William the Duke will, under any pretext, detain me here a captive?"

Now, though Mallet de Graville had lent himself to the service of an ignoble craft, he justified it by a better reason than complaisance to his lords; for, knowing William well, his hasty ire, and his relentless ambition, he was really alarmed for Harold's safety. And, as the reader may have noted, in suggesting that policy of intimidation, the knight had designed to give the Earl at least the benefit of forewarning. So, thus adjured, De Graville replied sincerely:

"Earl Harold, on my honour as your brother in knighthood I answer your plain question. I have cause to believe and to know that William will not suffer you to depart, unless fully satisfied on certain points, which he himself will, doubtless, ere long make clear to you."

"And if I insist on my departure, not so satisfying him?"

"Every castle on our road hath a dungeon as deep as Count Guy's; but where another William to deliver you from William?"

"Over yon seas, a prince mightier than William, and men as resolute, at least, as your Normans."

"*Cher et puissant*, my Lord Earl," answered De Graville, "these are brave words, but of no weight in the ear of a schemer so deep as the Duke. Think you really, that King Edward—pardon my bluntness—would rouse himself from his apathy, to do more in

your behalf than he has done in your kinsmen's—remonstrate and preach?—Are you even sure that on the representation of a man he hath so loved as William, he will not be content to rid his throne of so formidable a subject? You speak of the English people; doubtless you are popular and beloved, but it is the habit of no people, least of all your own, to stir actively and in concert, without leaders. The Duke knows the factions of England as well as you do. Remember how closely he is connected with Tostig, your ambitious brother. Have you no fear that Tostig himself, earl of the most warlike part of the kingdom, will not only do his best to check the popular feeling in your favour, but foment every intrigue to detain you here, and leave himself the first noble in the land? As for other leaders, save Gurth (who is but your own vice earl), who is there that will not rejoice at the absence of Harold? You have made foes of the only family that approaches the power of your own—the heirs of Leofric and Algar.—Your strong hand removed from the reins of the empire, tumults and dissensions ere long will break forth that will distract men's minds from an absent captive, and centre them on the safety of their own hearths, or the advancement of their own interests. You see that I know something of the state of your native land; but deem not my own observation, though not idle, sufficed to bestow that knowledge. I learn it more from William's discourses; William, who from Flanders, from Boulogne, from England itself, by a thousand channels, hears all that passes between the cliffs of Dover and the marches of Scotland."

Harold paused long before he replied, for his mind was now thoroughly awakened to his danger; and,

while recognising the wisdom and intimate acquaintance of affairs with which De Graville spoke, he was also rapidly revolving the best course for himself to pursue in such extremes. At length he said:

"I pass by your remarks on the state of England, with but one comment. You underrate Gurth, my brother, when you speak of him but as the vice earl of Harold. You underrate one, who needs but an object, to excel, in arms and in council, my father Godwin himself.—That object a brother's wrongs would create from a brother's love, and three hundred ships would sail up the Seine to demand your captive, manned by warriors as hardy as those who wrested Neustria from King Charles."

"Granted," said De Graville. "But William, who could cut off the hands and feet of his own subjects for an idle jest on his birth, could as easily put out the eyes of a captive foe. And of what worth are the ablest brain, and the stoutest arm, when the man is dependent on another for very sight!"

Harold involuntarily shuddered, but recovering himself on the instant, he replied, with a smile:

"Thou makest thy Duke a butcher more fell than his ancestor Rolfganger. But thou saidst he needed but to be satisfied on certain points. What are they?"

"Ah, *that* thou must divine, or he unfold. But see, William himself approaches you."

And here the Duke, who had been till then in the rear, spurred up with courteous excuses to Harold for his long defection from his side; and, as they resumed their way, talked with all his former frankness and gaiety.

"By the way, dear brother in arms," said he, "I have provided thee this evening with comrades most

welcome, I fear, than myself—Haco and Wolnoth. That last is a youth whom I love dearly: the first is unsocial eno', and methinks would make a better hermit than soldier. But, by St. Valery, I forgot to tell thee that an envoy from Flanders to-day, amongst other news, brought me some that may interest thee. There is a strong commotion in thy brother Tostig's Northumbrian earldom, and the rumour runs that his fierce vassals will drive him forth and select some other lord: talk was of the sons of Algar—so I think ye called the stout dead Earl. This looks grave, for my dear cousin Edward's health is failing fast. May the saints spare him long from their rest!"

"These are indeed ill tidings," said the Earl; "and I trust that they suffice to plead at once my excuse for urging my immediate departure. Grateful I am for thy most gracious hostship, and thy just and generous intercession with thy *liegeman*" (Harold dwelt emphatically on the last word), "for my release from a capture disgraceful to all Christendom. The ransom so nobly paid for me I will not insult thee, dear my lord, by affecting to repay; but such gifts as our cheapmen hold most rare, perchance thy lady and thy fair children will deign to receive at my hands. Of these hereafter. Now may I ask but a vessel from thy nearest port."

"We will talk of this, dear guest and brother knight, on some later occasion. Lo, yon castle—ye have no such in England. See its vawmures and fosses!"

"A noble pile," answered Harold. "But pardon me that I press for—"

"Ye have no such strongholds, I say, in England?" interrupted the Duke petulantly.

"Nay," replied the Englishman, "we have two

strongholds far larger than that—Salisbury Plain and Newmarket Heath![1]—strongholds that will contain fifty thousand men who need no walls but their shields. Count William, England's ramparts are her men, and her strongest castles are her widest plains."

"Ah!" said the Duke, biting his lip, "ah, so be it—but to return:—in that castle, mark it well, the Dukes of Normandy hold their prisoners of state;" and then he added with a laugh; "but we hold you, noble captive, in a prison more strong—our love and our heart."

As he spoke, he turned his eye full upon Harold, and the gaze of the two encountered: that of the Duke was brilliant, but stern and sinister; that of Harold, steadfast and reproachful. As if by a spell, the eye of each rested long on that of the other—as the eyes of two lords of the forest, ere the rush and the spring.

William was the first to withdraw his gaze, and as he did so, his lip quivered and his brow knit. Then waving his hand for some of the lords behind to join him and the Earl, he spurred his steed, and all further private conversation was suspended. The train pulled not bridle before they reached a monastery, at which they rested for the night.

CHAPTER V

On entering the chamber set apart for him in the convent, Harold found Haco and Wolnoth already awaiting him; and a wound he had received in the last skirmish against the Bretons, having broken out

[1] Similar was the answer of Goodyn the Bishop of Winchester, ambassador from Henry VIII. to the French King. To this day the English entertain the same notion of forts as Harold and Goodyn.

afresh on the road, allowed him an excuse to spend the rest of the evening alone with his kinsmen.

On conversing with them—now at length, and unrestrainedly—Harold saw everything to increase his alarm; for even Wolnoth, when closely pressed, could not but give evidence of the unscrupulous astuteness with which, despite all the boasted honour of chivalry, the Duke's character was stained. For, indeed in his excuse, it must be said, that from the age of eight, exposed to the snares of his own kinsmen, and more often saved by craft than by strength, William had been taught betimes to justify dissimulation, and confound wisdom with guile. Harold now bitterly recalled the parting words of Edward, and recognised their justice, though as yet he did not see all that they portended. Fevered and disquieted yet more by the news from England, and conscious that not only the power of his House and the foundations of his aspiring hopes, but the very weal and safety of the land, were daily imperilled by his continued absence, a vague and unspeakable terror for the first time in his life preyed on his bold heart—a terror like that of superstition, for, like superstition, it was of the Unknown; there was everything to shun, yet no substance to grapple with. He who could have smiled at the brief pangs of death, shrunk from the thought of the perpetual prison; he, whose spirit rose elastic to every storm of life, and exulted in the air of action, stood appalled at the fear of *blindness*;—blindness in the midst of a career so grand;—blindness in the midst of his pathway to a throne;—blindness, that curse which palsies the strong and enslaves the free, and leaves the whole man defenceless;—defenceless in an Age of Iron.

What, too, were those mysterious points on which he was to satisfy the Duke? He sounded his young kinsmen; but Wolnoth evidently knew nothing; Haco's eye showed intelligence, but by his looks and gestures he seemed to signify that what he knew he would only disclose to Harold. Fatigued, not more with his emotions than with that exertion to conceal them so peculiar to the English character (proud virtue of manhood so little appreciated, and so rarely understood!) he at length kissed Wolnoth, and dismissed him, yawning, to his rest. Haco, lingering, closed the door, and looked long and mournfully at the Earl.

"Noble kinsman," said the young son of Sweyn, "I foresaw from the first, that as our fate will be thine; —only round thee will be wall and fosse: unless, indeed, thou wilt lay aside thine own nature—it will give thee no armour here—and assume that which——"

"Ho!" interrupted the Earl, shaking with repressed passion, "I see already all the foul fraud and treason to guest and noble that surround me! But if the Duke dare such shame he shall do so in the eyes of day. I will hail the first boat I see on his river, or his sea-coast; and woe to those who lay hand on this arm to detain me!"

Haco lifted his ominous eyes to Harold's; and there was something in their cold and unimpassioned expression which seemed to repel all enthusiasm, and to deaden all courage.

"Harold," said he, "if but for one such moment thou obeyest the impulses of thy manly pride, or thy just resentment, thou art lost for ever; one show of violence, one word of affront, and thou givest the Duke the excuse he thirsts for. Escape! It is impossible.

For the last five years, I have pondered night and day the means of flight; for I deem that my hostageship, by right, is long since over; and no means have I seen or found. Spies dog my every step, as spies, no doubt, dog thine."

"Ha! it is true," said Harold; "never once have I wandered three paces from the camp or the troop, but, under some pretext, I have been followed by knight or courtier. God and our Lady help me, if but for England's sake! But what counsellest thou? Boy, teach me; thou hast been reared in this air of wile—to me it is strange, and I am as a wild beast encompassed by a circle of fire."

"Then," answered Haco, "meet craft by craft, smile by smile. Feel that thou art under compulsion, and act,—as the Church itself pardons men for acting, so compelled."

Harold started, and the blush spread red over his cheeks.

Haco continued.

"Once in prison, and thou art lost evermore to the sight of men. William would not then dare to release thee—unless, indeed, he first rendered thee powerless to avenge. Though I will not malign him, and say that he himself is capable of secret murder, yet he has ever those about him who are. He drops in his wrath some hasty word; it is seized by ready and ruthless tools. The great Count of Bretagne was in his way; William feared him as he fears thee; and in his own court, and amongst his own men, the great Count of Bretagne died by poison. For *thy* doom, open or secret, William, however, could find ample excuse."

"How, boy? What charge can the Norman bring against a free Englishman?"

"His kinsman Alfred," answered Haco, "was blinded, tortured, and murdered. And in the court of Rouen, they say these deeds were done by Godwin, thy father. The Normans who escorted Alfred were decimated in cold blood; again, they say Godwin thy father slaughtered them."

"It is hell's own lie!" cried Harold, "and so have I proved already to the Duke."

"Proved? No! The lamb does not prove the cause which is prejudged by the wolf. Often and often have I heard the Normans speak of those deeds, and cry that vengeance yet shall await them. It is but to renew the old accusation, to say Godwin's sudden death was God's proof of his crime, and even Edward himself would forgive the Duke for thy bloody death. But grant the best; grant that the more lenient doom were but the prison; grant that Edward and the English invaded Normandy to enforce thy freedom; knowest thou what William hath ere now done with hostages? He hath put them in the van of his army, and seared out their eyes in the sight of both hosts. Deemest thou he would be more gentle to us and to thee? Such are thy dangers. Be bold and frank,—and thou canst not escape them; be wary and wise, promise and feign,—and they are baffled: cover thy lion heart with the fox's hide until thou art free from the toils."

"Leave me, leave me," said Harold, hastily. "Yet, hold. Thou didst seem to understand me when I hinted of—in a word, what is the object William would gain from me?"

Haco looked around; again went to the door—again opened and closed it—approached, and whispered, "The crown of England!"

The crown of England.

The Earl bounded as if shot to the heart; then, again he cried: "Leave me. I must be alone—alone now. Go! go!"

CHAPTER VI

Only in solitude could that strong man give way to his emotions; and at first they rushed forth so confused and stormy, so hurtling one the other, that hours elapsed before he could serenely face the terrible crisis of his position.

The great historian of Italy has said, that whenever the simple and truthful German came amongst the plotting and artful Italians and experienced their duplicity and craft, he straightway became more false and subtle than the Italians themselves: to his own countrymen, indeed, he continued to retain his characteristic sincerity and good faith; but, once duped and tricked by the southern schemers, as if with a fierce scorn, he rejected troth with the truthless; he exulted in mastering them in their own wily statesmanship; and if reproached for insincerity, retorted with *naïve* wonder, "Ye Italians, and complain of insincerity! How otherwise can one deal with you—how be safe amongst you?"

Somewhat of this revolution of all the natural elements of his character took place in Harold's mind that stormy and solitary night. In the transport of his indignation, he resolved not doltishly to be thus outwitted to his ruin. The perfidious host had deprived himself of that privilege of Truth,—the large and heavenly security of man;—it was but a struggle of wit against wit, snare against snare. The state and law of warfare had started up in the lap of fraudful

peace; and ambush must be met by ambush, plot by plot.

Such was the nature of the self-excuses by which the Saxon defended his resolves, and they appeared to him more sanctioned by the stake which depended on success—a stake which his undying patriotism allowed to be far more vast than his individual ambition. Nothing was more clear than that if he were detained in a Norman prison, at the time of King Edward's death, the sole obstacle to William's design on the English throne would be removed. In the interim, the Duke's intrigues would again surround the infirm King with Norman influences; and in the absence both of any legitimate heir to the throne capable of commanding the trust of the people, and of his own preponderating ascendancy both in the Witan and the armed militia of the nation, what could arrest the designs of the grasping Duke? Thus his own liberty was indissolubly connected with that of his country; and for that great end, the safety of England, all means grew holy.

When the next morning he joined the cavalcade, it was only by his extreme paleness that the struggle and agony of the past night could be traced, and he answered with correspondent cheerfulness William's cordial greetings.

As they rode together—still accompanied by several knights, and the discourse was thus general, the features of the country suggested the theme of the talk. For, now in the heart of Normandy, but in rural districts remote from the great towns, nothing could be more waste and neglected than the face of the land. Miserable and sordid to the last degree were the huts of the serfs; and when these last met them on their

way, half naked and hunger-worn, there was a wild gleam of hate and discontent in their eyes, as they louted low to the Norman riders, and heard the bitter and scornful taunts with which they were addressed; for the Norman and the Frank had more than indifference for the peasants of their land; they literally both despised and abhorred them, as of different race from the conquerors. The Norman settlement especially was so recent in the land, that none of that amalgamation between class and class which centuries had created in England, existed there; though in England the theowe was wholly a slave, and the ceorl in a political servitude to his lord, yet public opinion, more mild than law, preserved the thraldom from wanton aggravation; and slavery was felt to be wrong and unchristian. The Saxon Church—not the less, perhaps, for its very ignorance—sympathised more with the subject population and was more associated with it, than the comparatively learned and haughty ecclesiastics of the continent, who held aloof from the unpolished vulgar. The Saxon Church invariably set the example of freeing the theowe and emancipating the ceorl, and taught that such acts were to the salvation of the soul. The rude and homely manner in which the greater part of the Saxon thegns lived—dependent solely for their subsistence on their herds and agricultural produce, and therefore on the labour of their peasants—not only made the distinctions of rank less harsh and visible, but rendered it the interest of the lords to feed and clothe well their dependents. All our records of the customs of the Saxons prove the ample sustenance given to the poor, and a general care for their lives and rights, which, compared with the Frank laws, may be called enlight-

ened and humane. And above all, the lowest serf ever had the great hope both of freedom and of promotion; but the beast of the field was holier in the eyes of the Norman, than the wretched villein.[1] We have likened the Norman to the Spartan, and, most of all, he was like him in his scorn of the helot.

Thus embruted and degraded, deriving little from religion itself, except its terrors, the general habits of the peasants on the continent of France were against the very basis of Christianity—marriage. They lived together for the most part without that tie, and hence the common name, with which they were called by their masters, lay and clerical, was the coarsest word contempt can apply to the sons of women.

"The hounds glare at us," said Odo, as a drove of these miserable serfs passed along. "They need ever the lash to teach them to know the master. Are they thus mutinous and surly in England, Lord Harold?"

"No: but there our meanest theowes are not seen so clad, nor housed in such hovels," said the Earl.

[1] See Mr. Wright's very interesting article on the "Condition of the English Peasantry," &c., Archæologia, vol. xxx. pp. 205–244. I must, however, observe, that one very important fact seems to have been generally overlooked by all inquirers, or, at least, not sufficiently enforced, viz., that it was the Norman's contempt for the general mass of the subject population which more, perhaps, than any other cause, broke up positive slavery in England. Thus the Norman very soon lost sight of that distinction the Anglo-Saxons had made between the agricultural ceorl and the theowe; *i.e.*, between the serf of the soil and the personal slave. Hence these classes became fused in each other, and were gradually emancipated by the same circumstances. This, be it remarked, could never have taken place under the Anglo-Saxon laws, which kept constantly feeding the class of slaves by adding to it convicted felons and their children. The subject population became too necessary to the Norman barons, in their feuds with each other, or their king, to be long oppressed; and, in the time of Froissart, that worthy chronicler ascribes the insolence, or high spirit, of *le menu peuple* to their *grand aise, et abondance de biens.*

"And is it really true that a villein with you can rise to be a noble?"

"Of at least yearly occurrence. Perhaps the forefathers of one-fourth of our Anglo-Saxon thegns held the plough, or followed some craft mechanical."

Duke William politicly checked Odo's answer, and said mildly:

"Every land its own laws: and by them alone should it be governed by a virtuous and wise ruler. But, noble Harold, I grieve that you should thus note the sore point in my realm. I grant that the condition of the peasants and the culture of the land need reform. But in my childhood, there was a fierce outbreak of rebellion among the villeins, needing bloody example to check, and the memories of wrath between lord and villein must sleep before we can do justice between them, as please St. Peter, and by Lanfranc's aid, we hope to do. Meanwhile, one great portion of our villeinage in our larger towns we have much mitigated. For trade and commerce are the strength of rising states; and if our fields are barren our streets are prosperous."

Harold bowed, and rode musingly on. That civilisation he had so much admired bounded itself to the noble class, and, at farthest, to the circle of the Duke's commercial policy. Beyond it, on the outskirts of humanity, lay the mass of the people. And here, no comparison in favour of the latter could be found between English and Norman civilisation.

The towers of Bayeux rose dim in the distance, when William proposed a halt in a pleasant spot by the side of a small stream, overshadowed by oak and beech. A tent for himself and Harold was pitched in haste, and after an abstemious refreshment, the Duke,

taking Harold's arm, led him away from the train along the margin of the murmuring stream.

They were soon in a remote, pastoral, primitive spot, a spot like those which the old menestrels loved to describe, and in which some pious hermit might, pleased, have fixed his solitary home.

Halting where a mossy bank jutted over the water, William motioned to his companion to seat himself, and reclining at his side, abstractedly took the pebbles from the margin and dropped them into the stream. They fell to the bottom with a hollow sound; the circle they made on the surface widened, and was lost; and the wave rushed and murmured on, disdainful.

" Harold," said the Duke at last, " thou hast thought, I fear, that I have trifled with thy impatience to return. But there is on my mind a matter of great moment to thee and to me, and it must out, before thou canst depart. On this very spot where we now sit, sate in early youth, Edward thy King, and William thy host. Soothed by the loneliness of the place, and the music of the bell from the church tower, rising pale through yonder glade, Edward spoke of his desire for the monastic life, and of his content with his exile in the Norman land. Few then were the hopes that he should ever attain the throne of Alfred. I, more martial, and ardent for him as myself, combated the thought of the convent, and promised, that, if ever occasion meet arrived, and he needed the Norman help, I would, with arm and heart, do a chief's best to win him his lawful crown. Heedest thou me, dear Harold?"

" Ay, my host, with heart as with ear."

" And Edward then, pressing my hand as I now

press thine, while answering gratefully, promised, that if he did, contrary to all human foresight, gain his heritage, he, in case I survived him, would bequeath that heritage to me. Thy hand withdraws itself from mine."

"But from surprise. Duke William, proceed."

"Now," resumed William, "when thy kinsmen were sent to me as hostages for the most powerful House in England—the only one that could thwart the desire of my cousin—I naturally deemed this a corroboration of his promise, and an earnest of his continued designs; and in this I was reassured by the prelate, Robert, Archbishop of Canterbury, who knew the most secret conscience of your King. Wherefore my pertinacity in retaining those hostages; wherefore my disregard to Edward's mere remonstrances, which I not unnaturally conceived to be but his meek confessions to the urgent demands of thyself and House. Since then, Fortune or Providence hath favoured the promise of the King, and my just expectations founded thereon. For one moment, it seemed indeed, that Edward regretted or reconsidered the pledge of our youth. He sent for his kinsman, the Atheling, natural heir to the throne. But the poor prince died. The son, a mere child, if I am rightly informed, the laws of thy land will set aside, should Edward die ere the child be grown a man; and, moreover, I am assured, that the young Edgar hath no power of mind or intellect to wield so weighty a sceptre as that of England. Your King, also, even since your absence, hath had severe visitings of sickness, and ere another year his new Abbey may hold his tomb."

William here paused; again dropped the pebbles into

the stream, and glanced furtively on the unrevealing face of the Earl. He resumed:

"Thy brother Tostig, as so nearly allied to my House, would, I am advised, back my claims; and wert thou absent from England, Tostig, I conceive, would be in thy place as the head of the great party of Godwin. But to prove how little I care for thy brother's aid compared with thine, and how implicitly I count on thee, I have openly told thee what a wilier plotter would have concealed—viz., the danger to which thy brother is menaced in his own earldom. To the point, then, I pass at once. I might, as my ransomed captive, detain thee here, until, without thee, I had won my English throne, and I know that thou alone couldst obstruct my just claims, or interfere with the King's will, by which that appanage will be left to me. Nevertheless, I unbosom myself to thee, and would owe my crown solely to thine aid. I pass on to treat with thee, dear Harold, not as lord with vassal, but as prince with prince. On thy part, thou shalt hold for me the castle of Dover, to yield to my fleet when the hour comes; thou shalt aid me in peace, and through thy National Witan, to succeed to Edward, by whose laws I will reign in all things conformably with the English rites, habits, and decrees. A stronger king to guard England from the Dane, and a more practised head to improve her prosperity, I am vain eno' to say thou wilt not find in Christendom. On my part, I offer to thee my fairest daughter, Adeliza, to whom thou shalt be straightway betrothed: thine own young unwedded sister, Thyra, thou shalt give to one of my greatest barons: all the lands, dignities, and possessions thou holdest now, thou shalt still retain; and if, as I suspect, thy brother

Tostig cannot keep his vast principality north the Humber, it shall pass to thee. Whatever else thou canst demand in guarantee of my love and gratitude, or so to confirm thy power that thou shalt rule over thy countships as free and as powerful as the great Counts of Provence or Anjou reign in France over theirs, subject only to the mere form of holding in fief to the Suzerain, as I, stormy subject, hold Normandy under Philip of France,—shall be given to thee. In truth, there will be two kings in England, though in name but one. And far from losing by the death of Edward, thou shalt gain by the subjection of every meaner rival, and the cordial love of thy grateful William.—Splendour of God, Earl, thou keepest me long for thine answer!"

"What thou offerest," said the Earl, fortifying himself with the resolution of the previous night, and compressing his lips, livid with rage, "is beyond my deserts, and all that the greatest chief under royalty could desire. But England is not Edward's to leave, nor mine to give: its throne rests with the Witan."

"And the Witan rests with thee," exclaimed William sharply. "I ask but for possibilities, man; I ask but all thine influence on my behalf; and if it be less than I deem, mine is the loss. What dost thou resign? I will not presume to menace thee; but thou wouldst indeed despise my folly, if now, knowing my designs, I let thee forth—not to aid, but betray them. I know thou lovest England, so do I. Thou deemest me a foreigner; true, but the Norman and Dane are of precisely the same origin. Thou, of the race of Canute, knowest how popular was the reign of that King. Why should William's be less so? Canute had no right whatsoever, save that of the sword. My right

will be kinship to Edward—Edward's wish in my favour—the consent through thee of the Witan—the absence of all other worthy heir—my wife's clear descent from Alfred, which, in my children, restore the Saxon line, through its purest and noblest ancestry, to the throne. Think over all this, and then wilt thou tell me that I merit not this crown?"

Harold yet paused, and the fiery Duke resumed:

"Are the terms I give not tempting eno' to my captive—to the son of the great Godwin, who, no doubt falsely, but still by the popular voice of all Europe, had power of life and death over my cousin Alfred and my Norman knights? or dost thou thyself covet the English crown; and is it to a rival that I have opened my heart?"

"Nay," said Harold in the crowning effort of his new and fatal lesson in simulation. "Thou hast convinced me, Duke William: let it be as thou sayest."

The Duke gave way to his joy by a loud exclamation, and then recapitulated the articles of the engagement, to which Harold simply bowed his head. Amicably then the Duke embraced the Earl, and the two returned towards the tent.

While the steeds were brought forth, William took the opportunity to draw Odo apart; and, after a short whispered conference, the prelate hastened to his barb, and spurred fast to Bayeux in advance of the party. All that day, and all that night, and all the next morn till noon, courtiers and riders went abroad, north and south, east and west, to all the more famous abbeys and churches in Normandy, and holy and awful was the spoil with which they returned for the ceremony of the next day.

CHAPTER VII

The stately mirth of the evening banquet seemed to Harold as the malign revel of some demoniac orgy. He thought he read in every face the exultation over the sale of England. Every light laugh in the proverbial ease of the social Normans rang on his ear like the joy of a ghastly Sabbat. All his senses preternaturally sharpened to that magnetic keenness in which we less hear and see than conceive and divine, the lowest murmur William breathed in the ear of Odo boomed clear to his own; the slightest interchange of glance between some dark-browed priest and large-breasted warrior, flashed upon his vision. The irritation of his recent and neglected wound combined with his mental excitement to quicken, yet to confuse, his faculties. Body and soul were fevered. He floated, as it were, between a delirium and a dream.

Late in the evening he was led into the chamber where the Duchess sat alone with Adeliza and her second son William—a boy who had the red hair and florid hues of the ancestral Dane, but was not without a certain bold and strange kind of beauty, and who, even in childhood, all covered with broidery and gems, betrayed the passion for that extravagant and fantastic foppery for which William the Red King, to the scandal of Church and pulpit, exchanged the decorous pomp of his father's generation. A formal presentation of Harold to the little maid was followed by a brief ceremony of words, which conveyed what to the scornful sense of the Earl seemed the mockery of betrothal between infant and bearded man. Glozing congratulations buzzed around him; then there was a

flash of lights on his dizzy eyes, he found himself moving through a corridor between Odo and William. He was in his room hung with arras and strewed with rushes; before him in niches, various images of the Virgin, the Archangel Michael, St. Stephen, St. Peter, St. John, St. Valery; and from the bells in the monastic edifice hard by tolled the third watch [1] of the night —the narrow casement was out of reach, high in the massive wall, and the starlight was darkened by the great church tower. Harold longed for air. All his earldom had he given at that moment, to feel the cold blast of his native skies moaning round his Saxon wolds. He opened his door, and looked forth. A lanthorn swung on high from the groined roof of the corridor. By the lanthorn stood a tall sentry in arms, and its gleam fell red upon an iron grate that jealously close the egress. The Earl closed the door, and sat down on his bed, covering his face with his clenched hand. The veins throbbed in every pulse, his own touch seemed to him like fire. The prophecies of Hilda on the fatal night by the bautastein, which had decided him to reject the prayer of Gurth, the fears of Edith, and the cautions of Edward, came back to him, dark, haunting, and overmasteringly. They rose between him and his sober sense, whenever he sought to recollect his thoughts, now to madden him with the sense of his folly in belief, now to divert his mind from the perilous present to the triumphant future they foretold; and of all the varying chaunts of the Vala, ever two lines seemed to burn into his memory, and to knell upon his ear, as if they contained the counsel they ordained him to pursue:

> "Guile by guile oppose, and never
> Crown and brow shall Force dissever!"

[1] Twelve o'clock.

So there he sat, locked and rigid, not reclining, not disrobing, till in that posture a haggard, troubled, fitful sleep came over him; nor did he wake till the hour of prime,[1] when ringing bells and tramping feet, and the hum of prayer from the neighbouring chapel, roused him into waking yet more troubled, and well-nigh as dreamy. But now Godrith and Haco entered the room, and the former inquired with some surprise in his tone, if he had arranged with the Duke to depart that day; "For," said he, "the Duke's horsthegn has just been with me, to say that the Duke himself, and a stately retinue, are to accompany you this evening towards Harfleur, where a ship will be in readiness for our transport; and I know that the chamberlain (a courteous and pleasant man) is going round to my fellow-thegns in your train, with gifts of hawks, and chains, and broidered palls."

"It is so," said Haco, in answer to Harold's brightening and appealing eye.

"Go then, at once, Godrith," exclaimed the Earl, bounding to his feet, "have all in order to part at the first break of the trump. Never, I ween, did trump sound so cheerily as the blast that shall announce our return to England. Haste—haste!"

As Godrith, pleased in the Earl's pleasure, though himself already much fascinated by the honours he had received and the splendour he had witnessed, withdrew, Haco said, "Thou hast taken my counsel, noble kinsman?"

"Question me not, Haco! Out of my memory, all that hath passed here!"

"Not yet," said Haco, with that gloomy and intense seriousness of voice and aspect, which was so at vari-

[1] Six A.M.

ance with his years, and which impressed all he said with an indescribable authority. "Not yet; for even while the chamberlain went his round with the parting gifts, I, standing in the angle of the wall in the yard, heard the Duke's deep whisper to Roger Bigod, who has the guard of the keape, 'Have the men all armed at noon in the passage below the council-hall, to mount at the stamp of my foot: and if then I give thee a prisoner—wonder not, but lodge him—' The Duke paused; and Bigod said, 'Where, my liege?' And the Duke answered fiercely, 'Where? why, where but in the *Tour noir?*—where but in the cell in which Malvoisin rotted out his last hour?' Not yet, then, let the memory of Norman wile pass away; let the lip guard the freedom still."

All the bright native soul that before Haco spoke had dawned gradually back on the Earl's fair face, now closed itself up, as the leaves of a poisoned flower; and the pupil of the eye receding, left to the orb that secret and strange expression which had baffled all readers of the heart in the look of his impenetrable father.

"*Guile by guile oppose!*" he muttered vaguely; then started, clenched his hand, and smiled.

In a few moments, more than the usual levee of Norman nobles thronged into the room; and what with the wonted order of the morning, in the repast, the church service of tierce, and a ceremonial visit to Matilda, who confirmed the intelligence that all was in preparation for his departure, and charged him with gifts of her own needlework to his sister the Queen, and various messages of gracious nature, the time waxed late into noon without his having yet seen either William or Odo.

He was still with Matilda, when the Lords Fitz-osborne and Raoul de Tancarville entered in full robes of state, and with countenances unusually composed and grave, and prayed the Earl to accompany them into the Duke's presence.

Harold obeyed in silence, not unprepared for covert danger, by the formality of the counts, as by the warnings of Haco; but, indeed, undivining the solemnity of the appointed snare. On entering the lofty hall, he beheld William seated in state; his sword of office in his hand, his ducal robe on his imposing form, and with that peculiarly erect air of the head which he assumed upon all ceremonial occasions.[1] Behind him stood Odo of Bayeux, in aube and pallium; some score of the Duke's greatest vassals; and at a little distance from the throne chair, was what seemed a table, or vast chest, covered all over with cloth of gold.

Small time for wonder or self-collection did the Duke give the Saxon.

"Approach, Harold," said he, in the full tones of that voice, so singularly effective in command; "approach, and without fear, as without regret. Before the members of this noble assembly—all witnesses of thy faith, and all guarantees of mine—I summon thee to confirm by oath the promises thou mad'st me yesterday; namely, to aid me to obtain the kingdom of

[1] A celebrated antiquary, in his treatise in the "Archæologia," on the authenticity of the Bayeux tapestry, very justly invites attention to the rude attempt of the artist to preserve individuality in his portraits; and especially to the singularly erect bearing of the Duke, by which he is at once recognised wherever he is introduced. Less pains are taken with the portrait of Harold: but even in that a certain elegance of proportion, and length of limb, as well as height of stature, are generally preserved.

England on the death of King Edward, my cousin; to marry my daughter Adeliza; and to send thy sister hither, that I may wed her, as we agreed, to one of my worthiest and prowest counts. Advance thou, Odo, my brother, and repeat to the noble Earl the Norman form by which he will take the oath."

Then Odo stood forth by that mysterious receptacle covered with the cloth of gold, and said briefly, "Thou wilt swear, as far as is in thy power, to fulfil thy agreement with William, Duke of the Normans, if thou live, and God aid thee; and in witness of that oath thou wilt lay thy hand upon the reliquaire," pointing to a small box that lay on the cloth of gold.

All this was so sudden—all flashed so rapidly upon the Earl, whose natural intellect, however great, was, as we have often seen, more deliberate than prompt—so thoroughly was the bold heart, which no siege could have sapped, taken by surprise and guile—so paramount through all the whirl and tumult of his mind, rose the thought of England irrevocably lost, if he who alone could save her was in the Norman dungeons—so darkly did all Haco's fears, and his own just suspicions, quell and master him, that mechanically, dizzily, dreamily, he laid his hand on the reliquaire, and repeated, with automaton lips:

"If I live, and if God aid me to it!"

Then all the assembly repeated solemnly:

"God aid him!"

And suddenly, at a sign from William, Odo and Raoul de Tancarville raised the gold cloth, and the Duke's voice bade Harold look below.

As when man descends from the gilded sepulchre to the loathsome charnel, so at the lifting of that cloth, all the dread ghastliness of Death was revealed.

There, from abbey and from church, from cyst and from shrine, had been collected all the relics of human nothingness in which superstition adored the mementos of saints divine; there lay, pell mell and huddled, skeleton and mummy—the dry dark skin, the white gleaming bones of the dead, mockingly cased in gold, and decked with rubies; there, grim fingers protruded through the hideous chaos, and pointed towards the living man ensnared; there, the skull grinned scoff under the holy mitre;—and suddenly rushed back, luminous and searing upon Harold's memory, the dream long forgotten, or but dimly remembered in the healthful business of life—the gibe and the wirble of the dead men's bones.

"At that sight," say the Norman chronicles, "the Earl shuddered and trembled."

"Awful, indeed, thine oath, and natural thine emotion," said the Duke; "for in that cyst are all those relics which religion deems the holiest in our land. The dead have heard thine oath, and the saints even now record it in the halls of heaven! Cover again the holy bones!"

BOOK X

THE SACRIFICE ON THE ALTAR

CHAPTER I

The good bishop Alred, now raised to the See of York, had been summoned from his cathedral seat by Edward, who had indeed undergone a severe illness, during the absence of Harold; and that illness had been both preceded and followed by mystical presentiments of the evil days that were to fall on England after his death. He had therefore sent for the best and the holiest prelate in his realm, to advise and counsel with.

The bishop had returned to his lodging in London (which was in a Benedictine Abbey, not far from the Aldgate) late one evening, from visiting the King at his rural palace of Havering; and he was seated alone in his cell, musing over an interview with Edward, which had evidently much disturbed him, when the door was abruptly thrown open, and pushing aside in haste the monk, who was about formally to announce him, a man so travel-stained in garb, and of a mien so disordered, rushed in, that Alred gazed at first as on a stranger, and not till the intruder spoke did he recognise Harold the Earl. Even then, so wild was the Earl's eye, so dark his brow, and so livid his cheek, that it rather seemed the ghost of the man than the man himself. Closing the door on the monk, the Earl stood a moment on the threshold, with a breast heaving with

emotions which he sought in vain to master; and, as if resigning the effort, he sprang forward, clasped the prelate's knees, bowed his head on his lap, and sobbed aloud. The good bishop, who had known all the sons of Godwin from their infancy, and to whom Harold was as dear as his own child, folding his hands over the Earl's head, soothingly murmured a benediction.

"No, no," cried the Earl, starting to his feet, and tossing the dishevelled hair from his eyes, "bless me not yet! Hear my tale first, and then say what comfort, what refuge, thy Church can bestow!"

Hurriedly then the Earl poured forth the dark story, already known to the reader,—the prison at Belrem, the detention at William's court, the fears, the snares, the discourse by the riverside, the oath over the relics. This told, he continued, "I found myself in the open air, and knew not, till the light of the sun smote me, what might have passed into my soul. I was, before, as a corpse which a witch raises from the dead, endows with a spirit not its own—passive to her hand—life-like, not living. Then, then it was as if a demon had passed from my body, laughing scorn at the foul things it had made the clay do. O, father, father! is there not absolution from this oath,—an oath I dare not keep? rather perjure myself than betray my land!"

The prelate's face was as pale as Harold's, and it was some moments before he could reply.

"The Church can loose and unloose—such is its delegated authority. But speak on; what saidst thou at the last to William?"

"I know not, remember not—aught save these words. 'Now, then, give me those for whom I placed myself in thy power; let me restore Haco to his fatherland, and Wolnoth to his mother's kiss, and wend

home my way.' And, saints in heaven! what was the answer of this caitiff Norman, with his glittering eye and venomed smile? 'Haco thou shalt have, for he is an orphan and an uncle's love is not so hot as to burn from a distance; but Wolnoth, thy mother's son, must stay with me as a hostage for thine own faith. Godwin's hostages are released; Harold's hostage I retain: it is but a form, yet these forms are the bonds of princes.'

"I looked at him, and his eye quailed. And I said, 'That is not in the compact.' And William answered, 'No, but it is the seal to it.' Then I turned from the Duke and I called my brother to my side, and I said, 'Over the seas have I come for thee. Mount thy steed and ride by my side, for I will not leave the land without thee.' And Wolnoth answered, 'Nay, Duke William tells me that he hath made treaties with thee, for which I am still to be the hostage; and Normandy has grown my home, and I love William as my lord.' Hot words followed, and Wolnoth, chafed, refused entreaty and command, and suffered me to see that his heart was not with England! O, mother, mother, how shall I meet thine eye! So I returned with Haco. The moment I set foot on my native England, that moment her form seemed to rise from the tall cliffs, her voice to speak in the winds! All the glamour by which I had been bound, forsook me; and I sprang forward in scorn, above the fear of the dead men's bones. Miserable overcraft of the snarer! Had my simple word alone bound me, or that word been ratified after slow and deliberate thought, by the ordinary oaths that appeal to God, far stronger the bond upon my soul than the mean surprise, the covert tricks, the insult and the mocking fraud. But as I rode on, the oath

pursued me—pale spectres mounted behind me on my steed, ghastly fingers pointed from the welkin; and then suddenly, O my father—I who, sincere in my simple faith, had, as thou knowest too well, never bowed submissive conscience to priest and Church—then suddenly I felt the might of some power, surer guide than that haughty conscience which had so in the hour of need betrayed me! Then I recognised that supreme tribunal, that mediator between Heaven and man, to which I might come with the dire secret of my soul, and say, as I say now, on my bended knee, O father—father—bid me die, or absolve me from my oath!"

Then Alred rose erect, and replied, "Did I need subterfuge, O son, I would say, that William himself hath released thy bond, in detaining the hostage against the spirit of the guilty compact; that in the very words themselves of the oath, lies the release—'*if God aid thee.*' God aids no child to parricide—and thou art England's child! But all school casuistry is here a meanness. Plain is the law, that oaths extorted by compulsion, through fraud and in fear, the Church hath the right to loose: plainer still the law of God and of man, that an oath to commit crime it is a deadlier sin to keep than to forfeit. Wherefore, not absolving thee from the misdeed of a vow that, if trusting more to God's providence and less to man's vain strength and dim wit, thou wouldst never have uttered even for England's sake—leaving her to the angels;—not, I say, absolving thee from that sin, but pausing yet to decide what penance and atonement to fix to its committal, I do in the name of the Power whose priest I am, forbid thee to fulfil the oath; I do release and absolve thee from all obligation thereto.

And if in this I exceed my authority as Romish priest, I do but accomplish my duties as living man. To these grey hairs I take the sponsorship. Before this holy cross, kneel, O my son, with me, and pray that a life of truth and virtue may atone the madness of an hour."

So by the crucifix knelt the warrior and the priest.

CHAPTER II

All other thought had given way to Harold's impetuous yearning to throw himself upon the Church, to hear his doom from the purest and wisest of its Saxon preachers. Had the prelate deemed his vow irrefragable, he would have died the Roman's death, rather than live the traitor's life; and strange indeed was the revolution created in this man's character, that he, "so self-dependent," he who had hitherto deemed himself his sole judge below of cause and action, now felt the whole life of his life committed to the word of a cloistered shaveling. All other thought had given way to that fiery impulse—home, mother, Edith, king, power, policy, ambition! Till the weight was from his soul, he was as an outlaw in his native land. But when the next sun rose, and that awful burthen was lifted from his heart and his being—when his own calm sense, returning, sanctioned the fiat of the priest,—when, though with deep shame and rankling remorse at the memory of the vow, he yet felt exonerated, not from the guilt of having made, but the deadlier guilt of fulfilling it—all the objects of existence resumed their natural interest, softened and chastened, but still vivid in the heart

restored to humanity. But from that time, Harold's stern philosophy and stoic ethics were shaken to the dust; re-created, as it were, by the breath of religion, he adopted its tenets even after the fashion of his age. The secret of his shame, the error of his conscience, humbled him. Those unlettered monks whom he had so despised, how had he lost the right to stand aloof from their control! how had his wisdom, and his strength, and his courage, met unguarded the hour of temptation!

Yes, might the time come, when England could spare him from her side! when he, like Sweyn the outlaw, could pass a pilgrim to the Holy Sepulchre, and there, as the creed of the age taught, win full pardon for the single lie of his truthful life, and regain the old peace of his stainless conscience!

There are sometimes event and season in the life of man the hardest and most rational, when he is driven perforce to faith the most implicit and submissive; as the storm drives the wings of the petrel over a measureless sea, till it falls tame, and rejoicing at refuge, on the sails of some lonely ship. Seasons when difficulties, against which reason seems stricken into palsy, leave him bewildered in dismay—when darkness, which experience cannot pierce, wraps the conscience, as sudden night wraps the traveller in the desert—when error entangles his feet in its inextricable web —when, still desirous of the right, he sees before him but a choice of evil; and the Angel of the Past, with a flaming sword, closes on him the gates of the Future. Then, Faith flashes on him, with a light from the cloud. Then, he clings to Prayer as a drowning wretch to the plank. Then, that solemn authority which clothes the Priest, as the interpreter between

the soul and the Divinity, seizes on the heart that trembles with terror and joy; then, that mysterious recognition of Atonement, of sacrifice, of purifying lustration (mystery which lies hid in the core of all religions), smoothes the frown on the Past, removes the flaming sword from the future. The Orestes escapes from the hounding Furies, and follows the oracle to the spot where the cleansing dews shall descend on the expiated guilt.

He who hath never known in himself, nor marked in another, such strange crisis in human fate, cannot judge of the strength and the weakness it bestows. But till he can so judge, the spiritual part of all history is to him a blank scroll, a sealed volume. He cannot comprehend what drove the fierce Heathen, cowering and humbled, into the fold of the Church; what peopled Egypt with eremites; what lined the roads of Europe and Asia with pilgrim homicides; what, in the elder world, while Jove yet reigned on Olympus, is couched in the dim traditions of the expiation of Apollo, the joy-god, descending into Hades; or why the sinner went blithe and light-hearted from the healing lustrations of Eleusis. In all these solemn riddles of the Jove world and the Christ's is involved the imperious necessity that man hath of repentance and atonement: through their clouds, as a rainbow, shines the covenant that reconciles the God and the man.

Now Life with strong arms plucked the reviving Harold to itself. Already the news of his return had spread through the city, and his chamber soon swarmed with joyous welcomes and anxious friends. But the first congratulations over, each had tidings that claimed his instant attention, to relate. His ab-

sence had sufficed to loosen half the links of that ill-woven empire.

All the North was in arms. Northumbria had revolted as one man, from the tyrannous cruelty of Tostig; the insurgents had marched upon York; Tostig had fled in dismay, none as yet knew whither. The sons of Algar had sallied forth from their Mercian fortresses, and were now in the ranks of the Northumbrians, who it was rumoured had selected Morcar (the elder) in the place of Tostig.

Amidst these disasters, the King's health was fast decaying; his mind seemed bewildered and distraught; dark ravings of evil portent that had escaped from his lip in his mystic reveries and visions, had spread abroad, bandied with all natural exaggerations, from lip to lip. The country was in one state of gloomy and vague apprehension.

But all would go well, now Harold the great Earl—Harold the stout, and the wise, and the loved—had come back to his native land!

In feeling himself thus necessary to England,—all eyes, all hopes, all hearts turned to him, and to him alone,—Harold shook the evil memories from his soul, as a lion shakes the dews from his mane. His intellect, that seemed to have burned dim and through smoke in scenes unfamiliar to its exercise, rose at once equal to the occasion. His words reassured the most despondent. His orders were prompt and decisive. While, to and fro, went forth his bodes and his riders, he himself leaped on his horse, and rode fast to Havering.

At length that sweet and lovely retreat broke on his sight, as a bower through the bloom of a garden. This was Edward's favourite abode: he had built it

himself for his private devotions, allured by its woody solitudes and gloom of its copious verdure. Here it was said, that once that night, wandering through the silent glades, and musing on heaven, the loud song of the nightingales had disturbed his devotions; with vexed and impatient soul, he had prayed that the music might be stilled: and since then, never more the nightingale was heard in the shades of Havering!

Threading the woodland, melancholy yet glorious with the hues of autumn, Harold reached the low and humble gate of the timber edifice, all covered with creepers and young ivy; and in a few moments more he stood in the presence of the King.

Edward raised himself with pain from the couch on which he was reclined,[1] beneath a canopy supported by columns and surmounted by carved symbols of the bell towers of Jerusalem: and his languid face brightened at the sight of Harold. Behind the King stood a man with a Danish battle-axe in his hand, the captain of the royal house-carles, who, on a sign from the King, withdrew.

"Thou art come back, Harold," said Edward then, in a feeble voice; and the Earl drawing near, was grieved and shocked at the alteration of his face. "Thou art come back, to aid this benumbed hand, from which the earthly sceptre is about to fall. Hush! for it is so, and I rejoice." Then examining Harold's features, yet pale with recent emotions, and now saddened by sympathy with the King, he resumed: "Well, man of this world, that went forth confiding in thine own strength, and in the faith of men of the world like thee,—well, were my warnings prophetic, or art thou contented with thy mission?"

[1] Bayeux tapestry.

"Alas!" said Harold, mournfully. "Thy wisdom was greater than mine, O King; and dread the snares laid for me and our native land, under pretext of a promise made by thee to Count William, that he should reign in England, should he be your survivor."

Edward's face grew troubled and embarrassed. "Such promise," he said, falteringly, "when I knew not the laws of England, nor that a realm could not pass like house and hyde by a man's single testament, might well escape from my thoughts, never too bent upon earthly affairs. But I marvel not that my cousin's mind is more tenacious and mundane. And verily, in those vague words, and from thy visit, I see the Future dark with fate and crimson with blood."

Then Edward's eyes grew locked and set, staring into space; and even that reverie, though it awed him, relieved Harold of much disquietude, for he rightly conjectured, that on waking from it Edward would press him no more as to those details, and dilemmas of conscience, of which he felt that the arch-worshipper of relics was no fitting judge.

When the King, with a heavy sigh, evinced return from the world of vision, he stretched forth to Harold his wan, transparent hand, and said:

"Thou seest the ring on this finger; it comes to me from above, a merciful token to prepare my soul for death. Perchance thou mayest have heard that once an aged pilgrim stopped me on my way from God's House, and asked for alms—and I, having nought else on my person to bestow, drew from my finger a ring, and gave it to him, and the old man went his way, blessing me."

"I mind me well of thy gentle charity," said the Earl; "for the pilgrim bruited it abroad as he passed, and much talk was there of it."

The King smiled faintly. "Now this was years ago. It so chanced this year, that certain Englishers, on their way from the Holy Land, fell in with two pilgrims—and these last questioned them much of me. And one, with face venerable and benign, drew forth a ring and said, 'When thou reachest England, give thou this to the King's own hand, and say, by this token, that on Twelfth-Day Eve he shall be with me. For what he gave to me, will I prepare recompense without bound; and already the saints deck for the new comer the halls where the worm never gnaws and the moth never frets.' 'And who,' asked my subjects amazed, 'who shall we say, speaketh thus to us?' And the pilgrim answered, 'He on whose breast leaned the Son of God, and my name is John!'[1] Wherewith the apparition vanished. This is the ring I gave to the pilgrim; on the fourteenth night from thy parting, miraculously returned to me. Wherefore, Harold, my time here is brief, and I rejoice that thy coming delivers me up from the cares of state to the preparation of my soul for the joyous day."

Harold, suspecting under this incredible mission some wily device of the Norman, who, by thus warning Edward (of whose precarious health he was well aware), might induce his timorous conscience to take steps for the completion of the old promise,—Harold, we say, thus suspecting, in vain endeavoured to combat the King's presentiments, but Edward interrupted him, with displeased firmness of look and tone:

"Come not thou, with thy human reasonings, between my soul and the messenger divine; but rather

[1] Ail., *de Vit. Edw.*—Many other chroniclers mention this legend, of which the stones of Westminster Abbey itself prated, in the statues of Edward and the Pilgrim, placed over the arch in Dean's Yard.

nerve and prepare thyself for the dire calamities that lie greeding in the days to come! Be thine, things temporal. All the land is in rebellion. Anlaf, whom thy coming dismissed, hath just wearied me with sad tales of bloodshed and ravage. Go and hear him;—go hear the bodes of thy brother Tostig, who wait without in our hall;—go, take axe, and take shield, and the men of earth's war, and do justice and right; and on thy return thou shalt see with what rapture sublime a Christian King can soar aloft from his throne! Go!"

More moved, and more softened, than in the former day he had been with Edward's sincere, if fanatical piety, Harold, turning aside to conceal his face, said:

"Would, O royal Edward, that my heart, amidst worldly cares, were as pure and serene as thine! But, at least, what erring mortal may do to guard this realm, and face the evils thou foreseest in the Far—that will I do; and perchance, then, in my dying hour, God's pardon and peace may descend on me!" He spoke, and went.

The accounts he received from Anlaf (a veteran Anglo-Dane), were indeed more alarming than he had yet heard. Morcar, the bold son of Algar, was already proclaimed, by the rebels, Earl of Northumbria; the shires of Nottingham, Derby, and Lincoln, had poured forth their hardy Dane populations on his behalf. All Mercia was in arms under his brother Edwin; and many of the Cymrian chiefs had already joined the ally of the butchered Gryffyth.

Not a moment did the Earl lose in proclaiming the Herr-bann; sheaves of arrows were splintered, and the fragments, as announcing the War-Fyrd, were sent from thegn to thegn, and town to town. Fresh mes-

sengers were despatched to Gurth to collect the whole force of his own earldom, and haste by quick marches to London; and, these preparations made, Harold returned to the metropolis, and with a heavy heart sought his mother, as his next care.

Githa was already prepared for his news; for Haco had of his own accord gone to break the first shock of disappointment. There was in this youth a noiseless sagacity that seemed ever provident for Harold. With his sombre, smileless cheek, and gloom of beauty, bowed as if beneath the weight of some invisible doom, he had already become linked indissolubly with the Earl's fate, as its angel,—but as its angel of darkness!

To Harold's intense relief, Githa stretched forth her hands as he entered, and said, "Thou hast failed me, but against thy will! grieve not; I am content!"

"Now our Lady be blessed, mother—"

"I have told her," said Haco, who was standing, with arms folded, by the fire, the blaze of which reddened fitfully his hueless countenance with its raven hair; "I have told thy mother that Wolnoth loves his captivity, and enjoys the cage. And the lady hath had comfort in my words."

"Not in thine only, son of Sweyn, but in those of fate; for before thy coming I prayed against the long blind yearning of my heart, prayed that Wolnoth might *not* cross the sea with his kinsmen."

"How!" exclaimed the Earl, astonished.

Githa took his arm, and led him to the farther end of the ample chamber, as if out of the hearing of Haco, who turned his face towards the fire, and gazed into the fierce blaze with musing, unwinking eyes.

"Couldst thou think, Harold, that in thy journey, that on the errand of so great fear and hope, I could sit

brooding in my chair, and count the stitches on the tremulous hangings? No; day by day have I sought the lore of Hilda, and at night I have watched with her by the fount, and the elm, and the tomb; and I know that thou hast gone through dire peril; the prison, the war, and the snare; and I know also, that his Fylgia hath saved the life of my Wolnoth; for had he returned to his native land, he had returned but to a bloody grave!"

"Says Hilda this?" said the Earl, thoughtfully.

"So say the Vala, the rune, and the Scin-læca! and such is the doom that now darkens the brow of Haco! Seest thou not that the hand of death is in the hush of the smileless lip, and the glance of the unjoyous eye?"

"Nay, it is but the thought born to captive youth, and nurtured in solitary dreams. Thou hast seen Hilda?—and Edith, my mother? Edith is—"

"Well," said Githa, kindly, for she sympathised with that love which Godwin would have condemned, "though she grieved deeply after thy departure, and would sit for hours gazing into space, and moaning. But even ere Hilda divined thy safe return, Edith knew it; I was beside her at the time; she started up, and cried, 'Harold is in England!'—'How?—Why thinkest thou so?' said I. And Edith answered, 'I feel it by the touch of the earth, by the breath of the air.' This is more than love, Harold. I knew two twins who had the same instinct of each other's comings and goings, and were present each to each even when absent: Edith is twin to my soul. Thou goest to her now, Harold: thou wilt find there thy sister Thyra. The child hath drooped of late, and I besought Hilda to revive her, with herb and charm.

Thou wilt come back, ere thou departest to aid Tostig, thy brother, and tell me how Hilda hath prospered with my ailing child?"

"I will, my mother. Be cheered!—Hilda is a skilful nurse. And now bless thee, that thou hast not reproached me that my mission failed to fulfil my promise. Welcome even our kinswoman's sayings, sith they comfort thee for the loss of thy darling!"

Then Harold left the room, mounted his steed, and rode through the town towards the bridge. He was compelled to ride slowly through the streets, for he was recognised; and cheapman and mechanic rushed from house and from stall to hail the Man of the Land and the Time.

"All is safe now in England, for Harold is come back!" They seemed joyous as the children of the mariner, when, with wet garments, he struggles to shore through the storm. And kind and loving were Harold's looks and brief words, as he rode with vailed bonnet through the swarming streets.

At length he cleared the town and the bridge; and the yellowing boughs of the orchards drooped over the road towards the Roman home, when, as he spurred his steed, he heard behind him hoofs as in pursuit, looked back, and beheld Haco. He drew rein,—"What wantest thou, my nephew?"

"Thee!" answered Haco, briefly, as he gained his side. "Thy companionship."

"Thanks, Haco; but I pray thee to stay in my mother's house, for I would fain ride alone."

"Spurn me not from thee, Harold! This England is to me the land of the stranger; in thy mother's house I feel but the more the orphan. Henceforth I have devoted to thee my life! And my life my dead

and dread father hath left to thee, as a doom or a blessing; wherefore cleave I to thy side;—cleave we in life and in death to each other!"

An undefined and cheerless thrill shot through the Earl's heart as the youth spoke thus; and the remembrance that Haco's counsel had first induced him to abandon his natural hardy and gallant manhood, meet wile by wile, and thus suddenly entangle him in his own meshes, had already mingled an inexpressible bitterness with his pity and affection for his brother's son. But, struggling against that uneasy sentiment, as unjust towards one to whose counsel—however sinister, and now repented—he probably owed, at least, his safety and deliverance, he replied gently:

"I accept thy trust and thy love, Haco! Ride with me, then; but pardon a dull comrade, for when the soul communes with itself the lip is silent."

"True," said Haco, "and I am no babbler. Three things are ever silent: Thought, Destiny, and the Grave."

Each then, pursuing his own fancies, rode on fast, and side by side; the long shadows of declining day struggling with a sky of unusual brightness, and thrown from the dim forest trees and the distant hillocks. Alternately through shade and through light rode they on; the bulls gazing on them from holt and glade, and the boom of the bittern sounding in its peculiar mournfulness of tone as it rose from the dank pools that glistened in the western sun.

It was always by the rear of the house, where stood the ruined temple, so associated with the romance of his life, that Harold approached the home of the Vala; and as now the hillock, with its melancholy diadem of stones, came in view, Haco for the first time broke the silence.

"Again—as in a dream!" he said, abruptly. "Hill, ruin, grave-mound—but where the tall image of the mighty one?"

"Hast thou then seen this spot before?" asked the Earl.

"Yea, as an infant here was I led by my father Sweyn; here too, from thy house yonder, dim seen through the fading leaves, on the eve before I left this land for the Norman, here did I wander alone; and there, by that altar, did the great Vala of the North chaunt her runes for my future."

"Alas! thou too!" murmured Harold; and then he asked aloud, "What said she?"

"That thy life and mine crossed each other in the skein; that I should save thee from a great peril, and share with thee a greater."

"Ah, youth," answered Harold, bitterly, "these vain prophecies of human wit guard the soul from no anger. They mislead us by riddles which our hot hearts interpret according to their own desires. Keep thou fast to youth's simple wisdom, and trust only to the pure spirit and the watchful God."

He suppressed a groan as he spoke, and springing from his steed, which he left loose, advanced up the hill. When he had gained the height, he halted, and made sign to Haco, who had also dismounted, to do the same. Half way down the side of the slope which faced the ruined peristyle, Haco beheld a maiden, still young, and of beauty surpassing all that the court of Normandy boasted of female loveliness. She was seated on the sward;—while a girl younger, and scarcely indeed grown into womanhood, reclined at her feet, and leaning her cheek upon her hand, seemed hushed in listening attention. In the face of the

younger girl Haco recognised Thyra, the last-born of Githa, though he had but once seen her before—the day ere he left England for the Norman court—for the face of the girl was but little changed, save that the eye was more mournful, and the cheek was paler.

And Harold's betrothed was singing, in the still autumn air, to Harold's sister. The song chosen was on that subject the most popular with the Saxon poets, the mystic life, death, and resurrection of the fabled Phœnix, and this rhymeless song, in its old native flow, may yet find some grace in the modern ear.

THE LAY OF THE PHŒNIX[1]

"Shineth far hence—so
Sing the wise elders—
Far to the fire-east
The fairest of lands.

"Daintily dight is that
Dearest of joy fields;
Breezes all balm-y-filled
Glide through its groves.

"There to the blest, ope
The high doors of heaven,
Sweetly sweep earthward
Their wavelets of song.

[1] This ancient Saxon lay, apparently of the date of the tenth or eleventh century, may be found, admirably translated by Mr. George Stephens, in the Archæologia, vol. xxx. p. 259. In the text the poem is much abridged, reduced into rhythm, and in some stanzas wholly altered from the original. But it is, nevertheless, greatly indebted to Mr. Stephens's translation, from which several lines are borrowed verbatim. The more careful reader will note the great aid given to a rhymeless metre by *alliteration*. I am not sure that this old Saxon mode of verse might not be profitably restored to our national muse.

"Frost robes the sward not,
Rusheth no hail-steel;
Wind-cloud ne'er wanders,
Ne'er falleth the rain.

"Warding the woodholt,
Girt with gay wonder,
Sheen with the plumy shine,
Phœnix abides.

"Lord of the Lleod,[1]
Whose home is the air,
Winters a thousand
Abideth the bird.

"Hapless and heavy then
Waxeth the hazy wing;
Year-worn and old in the
Whirl of the earth.

"Then the high holt-top,
Mounting, the bird soars;
There, where the winds sleep,
He buildeth a nest;—

"Gums the most precious, and
Balms of the sweetest,
Spices and odours, he
Weaves in the nest.

"There, in that sun-ark, lo,
Waiteth he wistful;
Summer comes smiling, lo,
Rays smite the pile!

"Burden'd with eld-years, and
Weary with slow time,
Slow in his odour-nest
Burneth the bird.

"Up from those ashes, then,
Springeth a rare fruit;
Deep in the rare fruit
There coileth a worm.

[1] People.

"Weaving bliss-meshes
Around and around it,
Silent and blissful, the
Worm worketh on.

"Lo, from the airy web,
Blooming and brightsome,
Young and exulting, the
Phœnix breaks forth.

"Round him the birds troop,
Singing and hailing;
Wings of all glories
Engarland the king.

"Hymning and hailing,
Through forest and sun-air,
Hymning and hailing,
And speaking him 'King.'

"High flies the phœnix,
Escaped from the worm-web
He soars in the sunlight,
He bathes in the dew.

"He visits his old haunts,
The holt and the sun-hill;
The founts of his youth, and
The fields of his love.

"The stars in the welkin,
The blooms on the earth,
Are glad in his gladness,
Are young in his youth.

"While round him the birds troop, the
Hosts of the Himmel,[1]
Blisses of music, and
Glories of wings;

"Hymning and hailing,
And filling the sun-air
With music, and glory
And praise of the King."

[1] Heaven.

As the lay ceased, Thyra said:

"Ah, Edith, who would not brave the funeral pyre to live again like the phœnix!"

"Sweet sister mine," answered Edith, "the singer doth mean to image out in the phœnix the rising of our Lord, in whom we all live again."

And Thyra said, mournfully:

"But the phœnix sees once more the haunts of his youth—the things and places dear to him in his life before. Shall we do the same, O Edith?"

"It is the persons we love that make beautiful the haunts we have known," answered the betrothed. "Those persons at least we shall behold again, and wherever *they* are—there is heaven."

Harold could restrain himself no longer. With one bound he was at Edith's side, and with one wild cry of joy he clasped her to his heart.

"I knew that thou wouldst come to-night—I knew it, Harold," murmured the betrothed.

CHAPTER III

While, full of themselves, Harold and Edith wandered, hand in hand, through the neighbouring glades —while into that breast which had forestalled, at least, in this pure and sublime union, the wife's privilege to soothe and console, the troubled man poured out the tale of the sole trial from which he had passed with defeat and shame,—Haco drew near to Thyra, and sate down by her side. Each was strangely attracted towards the other; there was something congenial in the gloom which they shared in common; though in the girl the sadness was soft and resigned,

in the youth it was stern and solemn. They conversed in whispers, and their talk was strange for companions so young; for, whether suggested by Edith's song, or the neighbourhood of the Saxon grave-stone, which gleamed on their eyes, grey and wan through the crommell, the theme they selected was of death. As if fascinated, as children often are, by the terrors of the Dark King, they dwelt on those images with which the northern fancy has associated the eternal rest, on —the shroud and the worm, and the mouldering bones —on the gibbering ghost, and the sorcerer's spell that could call the spectre from the grave. They talked of the pain of the parting soul, parting while earth was yet fair, youth fresh, and joy not yet ripened from the blossom—of the wistful lingering look which glazing eyes would give to the latest sunlight it should behold on earth; and then he pictured the shivering and naked soul, forced from the reluctant clay, wandering through cheerless space to the intermediate tortures, which the Church taught that none were so pure as not for a while to undergo; and hearing, as it wandered, the knell of the muffled bells and the burst of unavailing prayer. At length Haco paused abruptly and said:

"But thou, cousin, hast before thee love and sweet life, and these discourses are not for thee."

Thyra shook her head mournfully:

"Not so, Haco; for when Hilda consulted the runes, while, last night, she mingled the herbs for my pain, which rests ever hot and sharp here," and the girl laid her hand on her breast, "I saw that her face grew dark and overcast; and I felt, as I looked, that my doom was set. And when thou didst come so noiselessly to my side, with thy sad, cold eyes, O Haco, methought

I saw the Messenger of Death. But thou art strong, Haco, and life will be long for thee; let us talk of life."

Haco stooped down and pressed his lips upon the girl's pale forehead.

"Kiss me too, Thyra."

The child kissed him, and they sate silent and close by each other, while the sun set.

And as the stars rose, Harold and Edith joined them. Harold's face was serene in the starlight, for the pure soul of his betrothed had breathed peace into his own; and, in his willing superstition, he felt as if, now restored to his guardian angel, the dead men's bones had released their unhallowed hold.

But suddenly Edith's hand trembled in his, and her form shuddered.—Her eyes were fixed upon those of Haco.

"Forgive me, young kinsman, that I forget thee so long," said the Earl. "This is my brother's son, Edith; thou hast not, that I remember, seen him before?"

"Yes, yes;" said Edith, falteringly.

"When, and where?"

Edith's soul answered the question, "*In a dream;*" but her lips were silent.

And Haco, rising, took her by the hand, while the Earl turned to his sister—that sister whom he was pledged to send to the Norman court; and Thyra said, plaintively:

"Take me in thine arms, Harold, and wrap thy mantle round me, for the air is cold."

The Earl lifted the child to his breast, and gazed on her cheek long and wistfully; then questioning her tenderly, he took her within the house; and Edith followed with Haco.

"Is Hilda within?" asked the son of Sweyn.

"Nay, she hath been in the forest since noon," answered Edith with an effort, for she could not recover her awe of his presence.

"Then," said Haco, halting at the threshold, "I will go across the woodland to your house, Harold, and prepare your ceorls for your coming."

"I shall tarry here till Hilda returns," answered Harold, "and it may be late in the night ere I reach home; but Sexwolf already hath my orders. At sunrise we return to London, and thence we march on the insurgents."

"All shall be ready. Farewell, noble Edith; and thou, Thyra my cousin, one kiss more to our meeting again."

The child fondly held out her arms to him, and as she kissed his cheek whispered:

"In the grave, Haco!"

The young man drew his mantle around him, and moved away. But he did not mount his steed, which still grazed by the road; while Harold's, more familiar with the place, had found its way to the stall; nor did he take his path through the glades to the house of his kinsman. Entering the Druid temple, he stood musing by the Teuton tomb.

The night grew deeper and deeper, the stars more luminous and the air more hushed, when a voice close at his side, said, clear and abrupt:

"What does Youth the restless, by Death the still?"

It was the peculiarity of Haco, that nothing ever seemed to startle or surprise him. In that brooding boyhood, the solemn, quiet, and sad experience all fore-armed, of age, had something in it terrible and preternatural; so without lifting his eyes from the stone, he answered:

"How sayest thou, O Hilda, that the dead are still?"

Hilda placed her hand on his shoulder, and stooped to look into his face.

"Thy rebuke is just, son of Sweyn. In Time, and in the Universe, there is no stillness! Through all eternity the state impossible to the soul is repose!—So again thou art in thy native land?"

"And for what end, Prophetess? I remember, when but an infant, who till then had enjoyed the common air and the daily sun, thou didst rob me evermore of childhood and youth. For thou didst say to my father, that 'dark was the woof of my fate, and that its most glorious hour should be its last!'"

"But thou wert surely too childlike, (see thee now as thou wert then, stretched on the grass, and playing with thy father's falcon!)—too childlike to heed my words."

"Does the new ground reject the germs of the sower, or the young heart the first lessons of wonder and awe? Since then, Prophetess, Night hath been my comrade, and Death my familiar. Rememberest thou again the hour when, stealing, a boy, from Harold's house in his absence—the night ere I left my land—I stood on this mound by thy side? Then did I tell thee that the sole soft thought that relieved the bitterness of my soul, when all the rest of my kinsfolk seemed to behold in me but the heir of Sweyn, the outlaw and homicide, was the love that I bore to Harold; but that that love itself was mournful and bodeful as the hwata [1] of distant sorrow. And thou didst take me, O Prophetess, to thy bosom, and thy cold kiss touched my lips and my brow; and there, beside this

[1] Omen.

altar and grave-mound, by leaf and by water, by staff and by song, thou didst bid me take comfort; for that as the mouse gnawed the toils of the lion, so the exile obscure should deliver from peril the pride and the prince of my House—that, from that hour with the skein of his fate should mine be entwined; and his fate was that of kings and of kingdoms. And then, when the joy flushed my cheek, and methought youth came back in warmth to the night of my soul—then, Hilda, I asked thee if my life would be spared till I had redeemed the name of my father. Thy seidstaff passed over the leaves that, burning with fire-sparks, symbolled the life of the man, and from the third leaf the flame leaped up and died; and again a voice from thy breast, hollow, as if borne from a hill-top afar, made answer, 'At thine entrance to manhood life bursts into blaze, and shrivels up into ashes.' So I knew that the doom of the infant still weighed unannealed on the years of the man; and I come here to my native land as to glory and the grave. "But," said the young man, with a wild enthusiasm, "still with mine links the fate which is loftiest in England; and the rill and the river shall rush in one to the Terrible Sea."

"I know not that," answered Hilda, pale, as if in awe of herself: "for never yet hath the rune, or the fount or the tomb, revealed to me clear and distinct the close of the great course of Harold; only know I through his own stars his glory and greatness; and where glory is dim, and greatness is menaced, I know it but from the stars of others, the rays of whose influence blend with his own. So long, at least, as the fair and the pure one keeps watch in the still House of Life, the dark and the troubled one cannot wholly prevail. For Edith is given to Harold as the Fylgia,

that noiselessly blesses and saves: and thou—" Hilda checked herself, and lowered her hood over her face, so that it suddenly became invisible.

"And I?" asked Haco, moving near to her side.

"Away, son of Sweyn; thy feet trample the grave of the mighty dead!"

Then Hilda lingered no longer, but took her way towards the house. Haco's eye followed her in silence. The cattle, grazing in the great space of the crumbling peristyle, looked up as she passed; the watch-dogs, wandering through the star-lit columns, came snorting round their mistress. And when she had vanished within the house, Haco turned to his steed:

"What matters," he murmured, "the answer which the Vala cannot or dare not give? To me is not destined the love of woman, nor the ambition of life. All I know of human affection binds me to Harold; all I know of human ambition is to share in his fate. This love is strong as hate, and terrible as doom,—it is jealous, it admits no rival. As the shell and the seaweed interlaced together, we are dashed on the rushing surge; whither? oh, whither?"

CHAPTER IV

"I tell thee, Hilda," said the Earl, impatiently, "I tell thee that I renounce henceforth all faith save in Him whose ways are concealed from our eyes. Thy seid and thy galdra have not guarded me against peril, nor armed me against sin. Nay, perchance—but peace: I will no more tempt the dark art, I will no more seek to disentangle the awful truth from the juggling lie. All so foretold me I will seek to forget,

—hope from no prophecy, fear from no warning. Let the soul go to the future under the shadow of God!"

"Pass on thy way as thou wilt, its goal is the same, whether seen or unmarked. Peradventure thou art wise," said the Vala, gloomily.

"For my country's sake, heaven be my witness, not my own," resumed the Earl, "I have blotted my conscience and sullied my truth. My country alone can redeem me, by taking my life as a thing hallowed evermore to her service. Selfish ambition do I lay aside, selfish power shall tempt me no more; lost is the charm that I beheld in a throne, and, save for Edith—"

"No! not even for Edith," cried the betrothed, advancing, "not even for Edith shalt thou listen to other voice than that of thy country and thy soul."

The Earl turned round abruptly, and his eyes were moist.

"O Hilda," he cried, "see henceforth my only Vala; let that noble heart alone interpret to us the oracles of the future."

The next day Harold returned with Haco and a numerous train of his house-carles to the city. Their ride was as silent as that of the day before; but on reaching Southwark, Harold turned away from the bridge towards the left, gained the river-side, and dismounted at the house of one of his lithsmen (a franklin, or freed ceorl). Leaving there his horse, he summoned a boat, and, with Haco, was rowed over towards the fortified palace which then rose towards the west of London, jutting into the Thames, and which seems to have formed the outwork of the old Roman city. The palace, of remotest antiquity, and blending all work and architecture, Roman, Saxon,

and Danish, had been repaired by Canute; and from a high window in the upper story, where were the royal apartments, the body of the traitor Edric Streone (the founder of the house of Godwin) had been thrown into the river.

"Whither go we, Harold?" asked the son of Sweyn.

"We go to visit the young Atheling, the natural heir to the Saxon throne," replied Harold in a firm voice. "He lodges in the old palace of our kings."

"They say in Normandy that the boy is imbecile."

"That is not true," returned Harold. "I will present thee to him,—judge."

Haco mused a moment and said:

"Methinks I divine thy purpose; is it not formed on the sudden, Harold?"

"It was the counsel of Edith," answered Harold, with evident emotion. "And yet, if that counsel prevail, I may lose the power to soften the Church and to call her mine."

"So thou wouldest sacrifice even Edith for thy country."

"Since I have sinned, methinks I could," said the proud man humbly.

The boat shot into a little creek, or rather canal, which then ran inland, beside the black and rotting walls of the fort. The two Earl-born leapt ashore, passed under a Roman arch, entered a court the interior of which was rudely filled up by early Saxon habitations of rough timber work, already, since the time of Canute, falling into decay, (as all things did which came under the care of Edward,) and mounting a stair that ran along the outside of the house, gained a low narrow door, which stood open. In the passage within were one or two of the King's house-

carles who had been assigned to the young Atheling, with liveries of blue and Danish axes, and some four or five German servitors, who had attended his father from the Emperor's court. One of these last ushered the noble Saxons into a low, forlorn ante-hall; and there, to Harold's surprise they found Alred the Archbishop of York, and three thegns of high rank, and of lineage ancient and purely Saxon.

Alred approached Harold with a faint smile on his benign face:

"Methinks, and may I think aright!—thou comest hither with the same purpose as myself, and yon noble thegns."

"And that purpose?"

"Is to see and to judge calmly, if, despite his years, we may find in the descendant of the Ironsides such a prince as we may commend to our decaying King as his heir, and to the Witan as a chief fit to defend the land."

"Thou speakest the cause of my own coming. With your ears will I hear, with your eyes will I see; as ye judge, will judge I," said Harold, drawing the prelate towards the thegns, so that they might hear his answer.

The chiefs, who belonged to a party that had often opposed Godwin's House, had exchanged looks of fear and trouble when Harold entered; but at his words their frank faces showed equal surprise and pleasure.

Harold presented to them his nephew, with whose grave dignity of bearing beyond his years they were favourably impressed, though the good bishop sighed when he saw in his face the sombre beauty of the guilty sire. The group then conversed anxiously on

the declining health of the King, the disturbed state of the realm, and the expediency, if possible, of uniting all suffrages in favour of the fittest successor. And in Harold's voice and manner, as in Harold's heart, there was nought that seemed conscious of his own mighty stake and just hopes in that election. But as time wore, the faces of the thegns grew overcast; proud men and great satraps[1] were they, and they liked it ill that the boy-prince kept them so long in the dismal ante-room.

At length the German officer, who had gone to announce their coming, returned; and in words, intelligible indeed from the affinity between Saxon and German, but still disagreeably foreign to English ears, requested them to follow him into the presence of the Atheling.

In a room yet retaining the rude splendour with which it had been invested by Canute, a handsome boy, about the age of thirteen or fourteen, but seeming much younger, was engaged in the construction of a stuffed bird, a lure for a young hawk that stood blindfold on its perch. The employment made so habitual a part of the serious education of youth, that the thegns smoothed their brows at the sight, and deemed the boy worthily occupied. At another end of the room, a grave Norman priest was seated at a table on which were books and writing implements; he was the tutor commissioned by Edward to teach Norman tongue and saintly lore to the Atheling. A profusion of toys strewed the floor, and some children of Edgar's own age were playing with them. His lit-

[1] The Eastern word Satraps (*Satrapes*) made one of the ordinary and most inappropriate titles (borrowed, no doubt, from the Byzantine Court), by which the Saxons, in their Latinity, honoured their simple nobles.

tle sister Margaret[1] was seated seriously, apart from all the other children, and employed in needlework.

When Alred approached the Atheling, with a blending of reverent obeisance and paternal cordiality, the boy carelessly cried, in a barbarous jargon, half German, half Norman-French:

"There, come not too near, you scare my hawk. What are you doing? You trample my toys, which the good Norman bishop William sent me as a gift from the Duke. Art thou blind, man?"

"My son," said the prelate kindly, "these are the things of childhood—childhood ends sooner with princes than with common men. Leave thy lure and thy toys, and welcome these noble thegns, and address them, so please you, in our own Saxon tongue."

"Saxon tongue!—language of villeins! not I. Little do I know of it, save to scold a ceorl or a nurse. King Edward did not tell me to learn Saxon, but Norman! and Godfroi yonder says, that if I know Norman well, Duke William will make me his knight. But I don't desire to learn anything more to-day." And the child turned peevishly from thegn and prelate.

The three Saxon lords interchanged looks of profound displeasure and proud disgust. But Harold, with an effort over himself, approached, and said winningly:

"Edgar the Atheling, thou art not so young but thou knowest already that the great live for others. Wilt thou not be proud to live for this fair country, and these noble men, and to speak the language of Alfred the Great?"

[1] Afterwards married to Malcolm of Scotland, through whom, by the female line, the present royal dynasty of England assumes descent from the Anglo-Saxon kings.

"Alfred the Great! they always weary me with Alfred the Great," said the boy, pouting. "Alfred the Great, he is the plague of my life! if I am Atheling, men are to live for me, not I for them; and if you tease me any more, I will run away to Duke William in Rouen; Godfroi says I shall never be teased there!"

So saying, already tired of hawk and lure, the child threw himself on the floor with the other children, and snatched the toys from their hands.

The serious Margaret then rose quietly, and went to her brother, and said, in good Saxon:

"Fie! if you behave thus, I shall call you NIDDERING!"

At the threat of that word, the vilest in the language—that word which the lowest ceorl would forfeit life rather than endure—a threat applied to the Atheling of England, the descendant of Saxon heroes—the three thegns drew close, and watched the boy, hoping to see that he would start to his feet with wrath and in shame.

"Call me what you will, silly sister," said the child, indifferently, "I am not so Saxon as to care for your ceorlish Saxon names."

"Enow," cried the proudest and greatest of the thegns, his very moustache curling with ire. "He who can be called niddering shall never be crowned king!"

"I don't want to be crowned king, rude man, with your laidly moustache: I want to be made knight, and have banderol and baldric.—Go away!"

"We go, son," said Alred, mournfully.

And with slow and tottering step he moved to the door; there he halted, turned back,—and the child was pointing at him in mimicry, while Godfroi, the Nor-

man tutor, smiled as in pleasure. The prelate shook his head, and the group gained again the ante-hall.

"Fit leader of bearded men! fit king for the Saxon land!" cried a thegn. "No more of your Atheling, Alred my father!"

"No more of him, indeed!" said the prelate, mournfully.

"It is but the fault of his nurture and rearing,—a neglected childhood, a Norman tutor, German hirelings. We may remould yet the pliant clay," said Harold.

"Nay," returned Alred, "no leisure for such hopes, no time to undo what is done by circumstance, and, I fear, by nature. Ere the year is out the throne will stand empty in our halls."

"Who then," said Haco, abruptly, "who then,—(pardon the ignorance of youth wasted in captivity abroad!) who then, failing the Atheling, will save this realm from the Norman Duke, who, I know well, counts on it as the reaper on the harvest ripening to his sickle?"

"Alas, who then?" murmured Alred.

"Who then?" cried the three thegns, with one voice, "why the worthiest, the wisest, the bravest! Stand forth, Harold the Earl, Thou art the man!" And without awaiting his answer, they strode from the hall.

CHAPTER V

Around Northampton lay the forces of Morcar, the choice of the Anglo-Dane men of Northumbria. Suddenly there was a shout as to arms from the encampment; and Morcar, the young Earl, clad in his link mail, save his helmet, came forth, and cried:

"My men are fools to look that way for a foe; yonder lies Mercia, behind it the hills of Wales. The troops that come hitherward are those which Edwin my brother brings to our aid."

Morcar's words were carried into the host by his captains and warbodes, and the shout changed from alarm into joy. As the cloud of dust through which gleamed the spears of the coming force rolled away, and lay lagging behind the march of the host, there rode forth from the van two riders. Fast and far from the rest they rode, and behind them, fast as they could, spurred two others, who bore on high, one the pennon of Mercia, one the red lion of North Wales. Right to the embankment and palisade which begirt Morcar's camp rode the riders; and the head of the foremost was bare, and the guards knew the face of Edwin the Comely, Morcar's brother. Morcar stepped down from the mound on which he stood, and the brothers embraced amidst the halloos of the forces.

"And welcome, I pray thee," said Morcar, "our kinsman Caradoc, son of Gryffyth [1] the bold."

So Morcar reached his hand to Caradoc, stepson to his sister Aldyth, and kissed him on the brow, as was the wont of our fathers. The young and crownless prince was scarce out of boyhood, but already his name

[1] By his first wife; Aldyth was his second.

was sung by the bards, and circled in the halls of Gwynedd with the Hirlas horn; for he had harried the Saxon borders, and given to fire and sword even the fortress of Harold himself.

But while these three interchanged salutations, and ere yet the mixed Mercians and Welch had gained the encampment, from a curve in the opposite road, towards Towcester and Dunstable, broke the flash of mail like a river of light, trumpets and fifes were heard in the distance; and all in Morcar's host stood hushed but stern, gazing anxious and afar, as the coming armament swept on. And from the midst were seen the Martlets and Cross of England's king, and the Tiger heads of Harold; banners which, seen together, had planted victory on every tower, on every field, towards which they had rushed on the winds.

Retiring, then, to the central mound, the chiefs of the insurgent force held their brief council.

The two young Earls, whatever their ancestral renown, being yet new themselves to fame and to power, were submissive to the Anglo-Dane chiefs, by whom Morcar had been elected. And these, on recognising the standard of Harold, were unanimous in advice to send a peaceful deputation, setting forth their wrongs under Tostig, and the justice of their cause. "For the Earl," said Gamel Beorn (the head and front of that revolution,) "is a just man, and one who would shed his own blood rather than that of any other free-born dweller in England; and he will do us right."

"What, against his own brother?" cried Edwin.

"Against his own brother, if we convince but his reason," returned the Anglo-Dane.

And the other chiefs nodded assent. Caradoc's fierce eyes flashed fire; but he played with his torque, and spoke not.

Meanwhile, the vanguard of the King's force had defiled under the very walls of Northampton, between the town and the insurgents; and some of the light-armed scouts who went forth from Morcar's camp to gaze on the procession, with that singular fearlessness which characterised, at that period, the rival parties in civil war, returned to say that they had seen Harold himself in the foremost line, and that he was not in mail.

This circumstance the insurgent thegns received as a good omen; and, having already agreed on the deputation, about a score of the principal thegns of the north went sedately towards the hostile lines.

By the side of Harold,—armed in mail, with his face concealed by the strange Sicilian nose-piece used then by most of the Northern nations,—had ridden Tostig, who had joined the Earl on his march, with a scanty band of some fifty or sixty of his Danish house-carles. All the men throughout broad England that he could command or bribe to his cause, were those fifty or sixty hireling Danes. And it seemed that already there was dispute between the brothers, for Harold's face was flushed, and his voice stern, as he said, "Rate me as thou wilt, brother, but I cannot advance at once to the destruction of my fellow Englishmen without summons and attempt at treaty,—as has ever been the custom of our ancient heroes and our own House."

"By all the fiends of the North!" exclaimed Tostig, "it is foul shame to talk of treaty and summons to robbers and rebels. For what art thou here but for chastisement and revenge?"

"For justice and right, Tostig."

"Ha! thou comest not, then, to aid thy brother?"

"Yes, if justice and right are, as I trust, with him."

Before Tostig could reply, a line was suddenly cleared through the armed men, and, with bare heads, and a monk lifting the rood on high, amidst the procession advanced the Northumbrian Danes.

"By the red sword of St. Olave!" cried Tostig, "yonder come the traitors, Gamel Beorn and Gloneion! You will not hear them? If so, I will not stay to listen. I have but my axe for my answer to such knaves."

"Brother, brother, those men are the most valiant and famous chiefs in thine earldom. Go, Tostig, thou art not now in the mood to hear reason. Retire into the city; summon its gates to open to the King's flag. I will hear the men."

"Beware how thou judge, save in thy brother's favour!" growled the fierce warrior; and, tossing his arm on high with a contemptuous gesture, he spurred away towards the gates.

Then Harold, dismounting, stood on the ground, under the standard of his King, and round him came several of the Saxon chiefs, who had kept aloof during the conference with Tostig.

The Northumbrians approached, and saluted the Earl with grave courtesy.

Then Gamel Beorn began. But much as Harold had feared and foreboded as to the causes of complaint which Tostig had given to the Northumbrians, all fear, all foreboding, fell short of the horrors now deliberately unfolded; not only extortion of tribute the most rapacious and illegal, but murder the fiercest and most foul. Thegns of high birth, without offence or suspicion, but who had either excited Tostig's jealousy, or resisted his exactions, had been snared under peaceful pretexts into his castle,[1] and butchered in cold

[1] Flor. Wig.

blood by his house-carles. The cruelties of the old heathen Danes seemed revived in the bloody and barbarous tale.

"And now," said the thegn, in conclusion, "canst thou condemn us that we rose?—no partial rising;—rose all Northumbria! At first but two hundred thegns; strong in our course, we swelled into the might of a people. Our wrongs found sympathy beyond our province, for liberty spreads over human hearts as fire over a heath. Wherever we march, friends gather round us. Thou warrest not on a handful of rebels,—half England is with us!"

"And ye,—thegns," answered Harold, "ye have ceased to war against Tostig, your Earl. Ye war now against the King and the Law. Come with your complaints to your Prince and your Witan, and, if they are just, ye are stronger than in yonder palisades and streets of steel."

"And so," said Gamel Beorn, with marked emphasis, "now *thou* art in England, O noble Earl,—so are we willing to come. But when thou wert absent from the land, justice seemed to abandon it to force and the battle-axe."

"I would thank you for your trust," answered Harold, deeply moved. "But justice in England rests not on the presence and life of a single man. And your speech I must not accept as a grace, for it wrongs both my King and his Council. These charges ye have made, but ye have not proved them. Armed men are not proofs; and granting that hot blood and mortal infirmity of judgment have caused Tostig to err against you and the right, think still of his qualities to reign over men whose lands, and whose rivers, lie ever exposed to the dread Northern sea-kings.

Where will ye find a chief with arm as strong, and heart as dauntless? By his mother's side he is allied to your own lineage. And for the rest, if ye receive him back to his earldom, not only do I, Harold in whom you profess to trust, pledge full oblivion of the past, but I will undertake, in his name, that he shall rule you well for the future, according to the laws of King Canute."

"That will we not hear," cried the thegns, with one voice; while the tones of Gamel Beorn, rough with the rattling Danish burr, rose above all, "for we were born free. A proud and bad chief is by us not to be endured; we have learned from our ancestors to live free or die!"

A murmur, not of condemnation, at these words, was heard amongst the Saxon chiefs round Harold: and beloved and revered as he was, he felt that, had he the heart, he had scarce the power, to have coerced those warriors to march at once on their countrymen in such a cause. But foreseeing great evil in the surrender of his brother's interests, whether by lowering the King's dignity to the demands of armed force, or sending abroad in all his fierce passions a man so highly connected with Norman and Dane, so vindictive and so grasping, as Tostig, the Earl shunned further parley at that time and place. He appointed a meeting in the town with the chiefs; and requested them, meanwhile, to reconsider their demands, and at least shape them so as that they could be transmitted to the King, who was then on his way to Oxford.

It is in vain to describe the rage of Tostig, when his brother gravely repeated to him the accusations against him, and asked for his justification. Jus-

tification he could give not. His idea of law was but force, and by force alone he demanded now to be defended. Harold, then, wishing not alone to be judge in his brother's cause, referred further discussion to the chiefs of the various towns and shires, whose troops had swelled the War-Fyrd; and to them he bade Tostig plead his cause.

Vain as a woman, while fierce as a tiger, Tostig assented, and in that assembly he rose, his gonna all blazing with crimson and gold, his hair all curled and perfumed as for a banquet; and such, in a half-barbarous day, the effect of person, especially when backed by warlike renown, that the Proceres were half disposed to forget, in admiration of the earl's surpassing beauty of form, the dark tales of his hideous guilt. But his passions hurrying him away ere he had gained the middle of his discourse, so did his own relation condemn himself, so clear became his own tyrannous misdeeds, that the Englishmen murmured aloud their disgust, and their impatience would not suffer him to close.

"Enough," cried Vebba, the blunt thegn from Saxon Kent; "it is plain that neither King nor Witan can replace thee in thine earldom. Tell us not farther of these atrocities; or by're Lady, if the Northumbrians had chased thee not, we would."

"Take treasure and ship, and go to Baldwin in Flanders," said Thorild, a great Anglo-Dane from Lincolnshire, "for even Harold's name can scarce save thee from outlawry."

Tostig glared round on the assembly, and met but one common expression in the face of all.

"These are thy henchmen, Harold!" he said through his gnashing teeth; and, without vouchsafing farther word, strode from the council-hall.

That evening he left the town and hurried to tell to Edward the tale that had so miscarried with the chiefs. The next day, the Northumbrian delegates were heard; and they made the customary proposition in those cases of civil differences, to refer all matters to the King and the Witan; each party remaining under arms meanwhile.

This was finally acceded to. Harold repaired to Oxford, where the King (persuaded to the journey by Alred, foreseeing what would come to pass) had just arrived.

CHAPTER VI

The Witan was summoned in haste. Thither came the young earls Morcar and Edwin, but Caradoc, chafing at the thought of peace, retired into Wales with his wild band.

Now, all the great chiefs, spiritual and temporal, assembled in Oxford for the decree of that Witan on which depended the peace of England. The imminence of the time made the concourse of members entitled to vote in the assembly even larger than that which had met for the inlawry of Godwin. There was but one thought uppermost in the minds of men, to which the adjustment of an earldom, however mighty, was comparatively insignificant—viz., the succession of the kingdom. That thought turned instinctively and irresistibly to Harold.

The evident and rapid decay of the King; the utter failure of all male heir in the House of Cerdic, save only the boy Edgar; whose character (which throughout life remained puerile and frivolous) made the minority which excluded him from the throne seem

cause rather for rejoicing than grief: and whose rights, even by birth, were not acknowledged by the general tenor of the Saxon laws, which did not recognise as heir to the crown the son of a father who had not himself been crowned;[1]—forebodings of coming evil and danger, originating in Edward's perturbed visions; revivals of obscure and till then forgotten prophecies, ancient as the days of Merlin; rumours, industriously fomented into certainty by Haco, whose whole soul seemed devoted to Harold's cause, of the intended claim of the Norman Count to the throne;—all concurred to make the election of a man matured in camp and council, doubly necessary to the safety of the realm.

Warm favourers, naturally, of Harold, were the genuine Saxon population, and a large part of the Anglo-Danish—all the thegns in his vast earldom of Wessex, reaching to the southern and western coasts, from Sandwich and the mouth of the Thames to the Land's End in Cornwall; and including the free men of Kent, whose inhabitants even from the days of Cæsar had been considered in advance of the rest of the British population, and from the days of Hengist had exercised an influence that nothing save the warlike might of the Anglo-Danes counterbalanced. With Harold, too, were many of the thegns from his earlier earldom of East Anglia, comprising the county

[1] This truth has been overlooked by writers, who have maintained the Atheling's right as if incontestable. "An opinion prevailed," says Palgrave, "Eng. Commonwealth," pp. 559, 560, "that if the Atheling was born before his father and mother were ordained to the royal dignity, the crown did not descend to the child of uncrowned ancestors." Our great legal historian quotes Eadmer, "De Vit. Sanct. Dunstan," p. 220, for the objection made to the succession of Edward the Martyr, on this score.

of Essex, great part of Hertfordshire, and so reaching into Cambridge, Huntingdon, Norfolk, and Ely. With him, were all the wealth, intelligence, and power of London, and most of the trading towns; with him all the veterans of the armies he had led; with him too, generally throughout the empire, was the force, less distinctly demarked, of public and national feeling.

Even the priests, save those immediately about the court, forgot, in the exigency of the time, their ancient and deep-rooted dislike to Godwin's House; they remembered, at least, that Harold had never, in foray or feud, plundered a single convent; or in peace, and through plot, appropriated to himself a single hide of Church land; and that was more than could have been said of any other earl of the age—even of Leofric the Holy. They caught, as a Church must do, when so intimately, even in its illiterate errors, allied with the people as the old Saxon Church was, the popular enthusiasm. Abbot combined with thegn in zeal for Earl Harold.

The only party that stood aloof was the one that espoused the claims of the young sons of Algar. But this party was indeed most formidable; it united all the old friends of the virtuous Leofric, of the famous Siward; it had a numerous party even in East Anglia (in which earldom Algar had succeeded Harold); it comprised nearly all the thegns in Mercia (the heart of the country) and the population of Northumbria; and it involved in its wide range the terrible Welch on the one hand, and the Scottish domain of the sub-king Malcolm, himself a Cumbrian, on the other, despite Malcolm's personal predilections for Tostig, to whom he was strongly attached. But then the chiefs of this party, while at present they stood aloof, were

all, with the exception perhaps of the young earls themselves, disposed, on the slightest encouragement, to blend their suffrage with the friends of Harold; and his praise was as loud on their lips as on those of the Saxons from Kent, or the burghers from London. All factions, in short, were willing, in this momentous crisis, to lay aside old dissensions; it depended upon the conciliation of the Northumbrians, upon a fusion between the friends of Harold and the supporters of the young sons of Algar, to form such a concurrence of interests as must inevitably bear Harold to the throne of the empire.

Meanwhile, the Earl himself wisely and patriotically deemed it right to remain neuter in the approaching decision between Tostig and the young earls. He could not be so unjust and so mad as to urge to the utmost (and risk in the urging) his party influence on the side of oppression and injustice, solely for the sake of his brother; nor, on the other, was it decorous or natural to take part himself against Tostig; nor could he, as a statesman, contemplate without anxiety and alarm the transfer of so large a portion of the realm to the vice-kingship of the sons of his old foe—rivals to his power, at the very time when, even for the sake of England alone, that power should be the most solid and compact.

But the final greatness of a fortunate man is rarely made by any violent effort of his own. He has sown the seeds in the time foregone, and the ripe time brings up the harvest. His fate seems taken out of his own control: greatness seems thrust upon him. He has made himself, as it were, a *want* to the nation, a thing necessary to it; he has identified himself with his age, and in the wreath or the crown on his brow, the age itself seems to put forth its flower.

Tostig, lodging apart from Harold in a fort near the gate of Oxford, took slight pains to conciliate foes or make friends; trusting rather to his representations to Edward, (who was wroth with the rebellious House of Algar,) of the danger of compromising the royal dignity by concessions to armed insurgents.

It was but three days before that for which the Witan was summoned; most of its members had already assembled in the city; and Harold, from the window of the monastery in which he lodged, was gazing thoughtfully into the streets below, where, with the gay dresses of the thegns and cnehts, blended the grave robes of ecclesiastic and youthful scholar; —for to that illustrious university (pillaged the persecuted by the sons of Canute), Edward had, to his honour, restored the schools,—when Haco entered, and announced to him that a numerous body of thegns and prelates, headed by Alred, Archbishop of York, craved an audience.

"Knowest thou the cause, Haco?"

The youth's cheek was yet more pale than usual, as he answered slowly:

"Hilda's prophecies are ripening into truths."

The Earl started, and his old ambition reviving, flushed on his brow, and sparkled from his eye—he checked the joyous emotion, and bade Haco briefly admit the visitors.

They came in, two by two,—a body so numerous that they filled the ample chamber; and Harold, as he greeted each, beheld the most powerful lords of the land—the highest dignitaries of the Church—and, oft and frequent, came old foe by the side of trusty friend. They all paused at the foot of the narrow daïs on which Harold stood, and Alred repelled by a gest-

ure his invitation to the foremost to mount the platform.

Then Alred began an harangue, simple and earnest. He described briefly the condition of the country; touched with grief and with feeling on the health of the King, and the failure of Cerdic's line. He stated honestly his own strong wish, if possible, to have concentrated the popular suffrages on the young Athelıng; and under the emergence of the case, to have waived the objection to his immature years. But as distinctly and emphatically he stated, that that hope and intent he had now formally abandoned, and that there was but one sentiment on the subject with all the chiefs and dignitaries of the realm.

"Wherefore," continued he, "after anxious consultations with each other, those whom you see around have come to you: yea, to you, Earl Harold, we offer our hands and hearts to do our best to prepare for you the throne on the demise of Edward, and to seat you thereon as firmly as ever sate King of England and son of Cerdic;—knowing that in you, and in you alone, we find the man who reigns already in the English heart; to whose strong arm we can trust the defence of our land; to whose just thoughts, our laws.—As I speak, so think we all!"

With downcast eyes, Harold heard; and but by a slight heaving of his breast under his crimson robe, could his emotion be seen. But as soon as the approving murmur that succeeded the prelate's speech, had closed, he lifted his head, and answered:

"Holy Father, and you, Right Worthy my fellow-thegns, if ye could read my heart at this moment, believe that you would not find there the vain joy of aspiring man, when the greatest of earthly prizes is

placed within his reach. There, you would see, with deep and worldless gratitude for your trust and your love, grave and solemn solicitude, earnest desire to divest my decision of all mean thought of self, and judge only whether indeed, as king or as subject, I can best guard the weal of England. Pardon me, then, if I answer you not as ambition alone would answer; neither deem me insensible to the glorious lot of presiding, under heaven, and by the light of our laws, over the destinies of the English realm,—if I pause to weigh well the responsibilities incurred, and the obstacles to be surmounted. There is that on my mind that I would fain unbosom, not of a nature to discuss in an assembly so numerous, but which I would rather submit to a chosen few whom you yourselves may select to hear me, in whose cool wisdom, apart from personal love to me, ye may best confide;—your most veteran thegns, your most honoured prelates: To them will I speak, to them make clean my bosom; and to their answer, their counsels, will I in all things defer: whether with loyal heart to serve another, whom, hearing me, they may decide to choose; or to fit my soul to bear, not unworthily, the weight of a kingly crown."

Alred lifted his mild eyes to Harold, and there were both pity and approval in his gaze, for he divined the Earl.

"Thou hast chosen the right course, my son; and we will retire at once, and elect those with whom thou mayest freely confer, and by whose judgment thou mayest righteously abide."

The prelate turned, and with him went the conclave.

Left alone with Haco, the last said, abruptly:

"Thou wilt not be so indiscreet, O Harold, as

to confess thy compelled oath to the fraudful Norman?"

"That is my design," replied Harold, coldly.

The son of Sweyn began to remonstrate, but the Earl cut him short.

"If the Norman say that he has been deceived in Harold, never so shall say the men of England. Leave me. I know not why, Haco, but in thy presence, at times, there is a glamour as strong as in the spells of Hilda. Go, dear boy; the fault is not in thee, but in the superstitious infirmities of a man who hath once lowered, or, it may be, too highly strained, his reason to the things of a haggard fancy. Go! and send to me my brother Gurth. I would have him alone of my House present at this solemn crisis of its fate."

Haco bowed his head, and went.

In a few moments more, Gurth came in. To this pure and spotless spirit Harold had already related the events of his unhappy visit to the Norman; and he felt, as the young chief pressed his hand, and looked on him with his clear and loving eyes, as if Honour made palpable stood by his side.

Six of the ecclesiastics, most eminent for Church learning,—small as was that which they could boast, compared with the scholars of Normandy and the Papal States, but at least more intelligent and more free from mere formal monasticism than most of their Saxon contemporaries,—and six of the chiefs most renowned for experience in war or council, selected under the sagacious promptings of Alred, accompanied that prelate to the presence of the Earl.

"Close, thou! close! close! Gurth," whispered Harold: "for this is a confession against man's pride, and sorely doth it shame;—so that I would have thy bold sinless heart beating near to mine."

Then, leaning his arm upon his brother's shoulder, and in a voice, the first tones of which, as betraying earnest emotion, irresistibly chained and affected his noble audience, Harold began his tale.

Various were the emotions, though all more akin to terror than repugnance, with which the listeners heard the Earl's plain and candid recital.

Among the lay-chiefs the impression made by the compelled oath was comparatively slight: for it was the worst vice of the Saxon laws, to entangle all charges, from the smallest to the greatest, in a reckless multiplicity of oaths,[1] to the grievous loosening of the bonds of truth: and oaths then had become almost as much mere matter of legal form, as certain oaths—bad relic of those times!—still existing in our parliamentary and collegiate proceedings, are deemed by men, not otherwise dishonourable, even now. And to no kind of oath was more latitude given than to such as related to fealty to a chief: for these, in the constant rebellions which happened year after year, were openly violated, and without reproach. Not a sub-king in Wales who harried the border, not an earl who raised banner against the Basileus of Britain, but infringed his oath to be good man and true to the lord paramount; and even William the Norman himself never found his oath of fealty stand in the way, whenever he deemed it right and expedient to take arms against his suzerain of France.

On the churchmen the impression was stronger and more serious: not that made by the oath itself, but by the relics on which the hand had been laid. They

[1] See the judicious remarks of Henry, "Hist. of Britain," on this head. From the lavish abuse of oaths, perjury had come to be reckoned one of the national vices of the Saxon.

looked at each other, doubtful and appalled, when the Earl ceased his tale; while only among the laymen circled a murmur of mingled wrath at William's bold design on their native land, and of scorn at the thought that an oath, surprised and compelled, should be made the instrument of treason to a whole people.

"Thus," said Harold, after a pause, "thus have I made clear to you my conscience, and revealed to you the only obstacle between your offers and my choice. From the keeping of an oath so extorted, and so deadly to England, this venerable prelate and mine own soul have freed me. Whether as king or as subject, I shall alike revere the living and their long posterity more than the dead men's bones, and, with sword and with battle-axe, hew out against the invader my best atonement for the lip's weakness and the heart's desertion. But whether, knowing what hath passed, ye may not deem it safer for the land to elect another king,—this it is which, free and fore-thoughtful of every chance, ye should now decide."

With these words he stepped from the daïs, and retired into the oratory that adjoined the chamber, followed by Gurth. The eyes of the priests then turned to Alred, and to them the prelate spoke as he had done before to Harold;—he distinguished between the oath and its fulfilment—between the lesser sin and the greater—the one which the Church could absolve—the one which no Church had the right to exact, and which, if fulfilled, no penance could expiate. He owned frankly, nevertheless, that it was the difficulties so created, that had made him incline to the Atheling;—but, convinced of that prince's incapacity, even in the most ordinary times, to rule England, he shrank yet more from such a choice, when the swords

of the Norman were already sharpening for contest. Finally he said, "If a man as fit to defend us as Harold can be found, let us prefer him: if not——"

"There is no other man!" cried the thegns with one voice. "And," said a wise old chief, "had Harold sought to play a trick to secure the throne, he could not have devised one more sure than the tale he hath now told us. What! just when we are most assured that the doughtiest and deadliest foe that our land can brave, waits but for Edward's death to enforce on us a stranger's yoke—what! shall we for that very reason deprive ourselves of the only man able to resist him? Harold hath taken an oath! God wot, who among us have not taken some oath at law for which they have deemed it meet afterwards to do a penance, or endow a convent? The wisest means to strengthen Harold against that oath, is to show the moral impossibility of fulfilling it, by placing him on the throne. The best proof we can give to this insolent Norman that England is not for prince to leave, or subject to barter, is to choose solemnly in our Witan the very chief whom his frauds prove to us that he fears the most. Why, William would laugh in his own sleeve to summon a king to descend from his throne to do him the homage which that king, in the different capacity of subject, had (we will grant, even willingly) promised to render."

This speech spoke all the thoughts of the laymen, and, with Alred's previous remarks, reassured all the ecclesiastics. They were easily induced to believe that the usual Church penances, and ample Church gifts, would suffice for the insult offered to the relics: and,—if they in so grave a case outstripped, in absolution, an authority amply sufficing for all ordinary

matters,—Harold, as king, might easily gain from the Pope himself that full pardon and shrift, which as mere earl, against the Prince of the Normans, he would fail of obtaining.

These or similar reflections soon terminated the suspense of the select council; and Alred sought the Earl in the oratory, to summon him back to the conclave. The two brothers were kneeling side by side before the little altar; and there was something inexpressibly touching in their humble attitudes, their clasped supplicating hands, in that moment when the crown of England rested above their House.

The brothers rose, and at Alred's sign followed the prelate into the council-room. Alred briefly communicated the result of the conference; and with an aspect, and in a tone, free alike from triumph and indecision, Harold replied:

"As ye will, so will I. Place me only where I can most serve the common cause. Remain you now, knowing my secret, a chosen and standing council: too great is my personal stake in this matter to allow my mind to be unbiassed; judge ye, then, and decide for me in all things: your minds should be calmer and wiser than mine; in all things I will abide by your counsel; and thus I accept the trust of a nation's freedom."

Each thegn then put his hand into Harold's, and called himself Harold's man.

"Now, more than ever," said the wise old thegn who had before spoken, "will it be needful to heal all dissension in the kingdom—to reconcile with us Mercia and Northumbria, and make the kingdom one against the foe. You, as Tostig's brother, have done well to abstain from active interference; you do well

to leave it to us to negotiate the necessary alliance between all brave and good men."

"And to that end, as imperative for the public weal, you consent," said Alred, thoughtfully, "to abide by our advice, whatever it be?"

"Whatever it be, so that it serve England," answered the Earl.

A smile, somewhat sad, flitted over the prelate's pale lips, and Harold was once more alone with Gurth.

CHAPTER VII

The soul of all council and cabal on behalf of Harold, which has led to the determination of the principal chiefs, and which now succeeded it—was Haco.

His rank as son of Sweyn, the firstborn of Godwin's house—a rank which might have authorised some pretensions on his own part, gave him all field for the exercise of an intellect singularly keen and profound. Accustomed to an atmosphere of practical state-craft in the Norman court, with faculties sharpened from boyhood by vigilance and meditation, he exercised an extraordinary influence over the simple understandings of the homely clergy and the uncultured thegns. Impressed with the conviction of his early doom, he felt no interest in the objects of others; but equally believing that whatever of bright, and brave, and glorious, in his brief, condemned career, was to be reflected on him from the light of Harold's destiny, the sole desire of a nature, which, under other auspices, would have been intensely daring and ambitious, was to administer to Harold's greatness. No prejudice, no principle, stood in the way of this dreary

enthusiasm. As a father, himself on the brink of the grave, schemes for the worldly grandeur of the son, in which he confounds and melts his own life, so this sombre and predestined man, dead to earth and to joy and the emotions of the heart, looked beyond his own tomb, to that existence in which he transferred and carried on his ambition.

If the leading agencies of Harold's memorable career might be, as it were, symbolised and allegorised, by the living beings with which it was connected—as Edith was the representative of stainless Truth—as Gurth was the type of dauntless Duty—as Hilda embodied aspiring Imagination—so Haco seemed the personation of Worldly Wisdom. And cold in that worldly wisdom Haco laboured on, now conferring with Alred and the partisans of Harold; now closeted with Edwin and Morcar; now gliding from the chamber of the sick King.—That wisdom foresaw all obstacles, smoothed all difficulties; ever calm, never resting; marshalling and harmonising the things to be, like the ruthless hand of a tranquil fate. But there was one with whom Haco was more often than with all others—one whom the presence of Harold had allured to that anxious scene of intrigue, and whose heart leapt high at the hopes whispered from the smileless lips of Haco.

CHAPTER VIII

It was the second day after that which assured him the allegiance of the thegns, that a message was brought to Harold from the Lady Aldyth. She was in Oxford, at a convent, with her young daughter by the Welch King; she prayed him to visit her. The

Earl, whose active mind, abstaining from the intrigues around him, was delivered up to the thoughts, restless and feverish, which haunt the repose of all active minds, was not unwilling to escape awhile from himself. He went to Aldyth. The royal widow had laid by the signs of mourning; she was dressed with the usual stately and loose-robed splendour of Saxon matrons, and all the proud beauty of her youth was restored to her cheek. At her feet was that daughter who afterwards married the Fleance so familiar to us in Shakespeare, and became the ancestral mother of those Scottish kings who had passed, in pale shadows, across the eyes of Macbeth;[1] by the side of that child, Harold to his surprise saw the ever ominous face of Haco.

But proud as was Aldyth, all pride seemed humbled into woman's sweeter emotions at the sight of the Earl, and she was at first unable to command words to answer his greeting.

Gradually, however, she warmed into cordial confidence. She touched lightly on her past sorrows; she permitted it to be seen that her lot with the fierce Gryffyth had been one not more of public calamity than of domestic grief, and that in the natural awe and horror which the murder of her lord had caused, she felt rather for the ill-starred king than the beloved spouse. She then passed to the differences still existing between her house and Harold's, and spoke well and wisely of the desire of the young Earls to conciliate his grace and favour.

While thus speaking, Morcar and Edwin, as if accidentally, entered, and their salutations of Harold were such as became their relative positions; reserved, not

[1] And so, from Gryffyth, beheaded by his subjects, descended Charles Stuart.

distant—respectful, not servile. With the delicacy of high natures, they avoided touching on the cause before the Witan (fixed for the morrow), on which depended their earldoms or their exile.

Harold was pleased by their bearing, and attracted towards them by the memory of the affectionate words that had passed between him and Leofric, their illustrious grandsire, over his father's corpse. He thought then of his own prayer: "Let there be peace between thine and mine!" and looking at their fair and stately youth, and noble carriage, he could not but feel that the men of Northumbria and of Mercia had chosen well. The discourse, however, was naturally brief, since thus made general; the visit soon ceased, and the brothers attended Harold to the door with the courtesy of the times. Then Haco said, with that faint movement of the lips which was his only approach to a smile:

"Will ye not, noble thegns, give your hands to my kinsman?"

"Surely," said Edwin, the handsomer and more gentle of the two, and who, having a poet's nature, felt a poet's enthusiasm for the gallant deeds even of a rival,—"surely, if the Earl will accept the hands of those who trust never to be compelled to draw sword against England's hero."

Harold stretched forth his hand in reply, and that cordial and immemorial pledge of our national friendships was interchanged.

Gaining the street, Harold said to his nephew:

"Standing as I do towards the young Earls, that appeal of thine had been better omitted."

"Nay," answered Haco; "their cause is already prejudged in their favour. And thou must ally thyself

with the heirs of Leofric, and the successors of Siward."

Harold made no answer. There was something in the positive tone of this beardless youth that displeased him; but he remembered that Haco was the son of Sweyn, Godwin's first-born, and that, but for Sweyn's crimes, Haco might have held the place in England he held himself, and looked to the same august destinies beyond.

In the evening a messenger from the Roman house arrived, with two letters for Harold; one from Hilda, that contained but these words: "Again peril menaces thee, but in the shape of good. Beware! and, above all, of the evil that wears the form of wisdom."

The other letter was from Edith; it was long for the letters of that age, and every sentence spoke a heart wrapped in his.

Reading the last, Hilda's warnings were forgotten. The picture of Edith—the prospect of a power that might at last effect their union, and reward her long devotion—rose before him, to the exclusion of wilder fancies and loftier hopes; and his sleep that night was full of youthful and happy dreams.

The next day the Witan met. The meeting was less stormy than had been expected; for the minds of most men were made up, and so far as Tostig was interested, the facts were too evident and notorious, the witnesses too numerous, to leave any option to the judges. Edward, on whom alone Tostig had relied, had already, with his ordinary vacillation, been swayed towards a right decision, partly by the counsels of Alred and his other prelates, and especially by the representations of Haco, whose grave bearing and profound dissimulation had gained a singular influence over the formal and melancholy King.

By some previous compact or understanding between the opposing parties, there was no attempt, however, to push matters against the offending Tostig to vindictive extremes. There was no suggestion of outlawry, or punishment, beyond the simple deprivation of the earldom he had abused. And in return for this moderation on the one side, the other agreed to support and ratify the new election of the Northumbrians. Morcar was thus formally invested with the vice-kingship of that great realm; while Edwin was confirmed in the earldom of the principal part of Mercia.

On the announcement of these decrees, which were received with loud applause by all the crowd assembled to hear them, Tostig, rallying round him his house-carles, left the town. He went first to Githa, with whom his wife had sought refuge, and, after a long conference with his mother, he, and his haughty Countess, journeyed to the sea-coast, and took ship for Flanders.

CHAPTER IX

Gurth and Harold were seated in close commune in the Earl's chamber, at an hour long after the complin (or second vespers), when Alred entered unexpectedly. The old man's face was unusually grave, and Harold's penetrating eye saw that he was gloomy with some matters of great moment.

"Harold," said the prelate, seating himself, "the hour has come to test thy truth, when thou saidst that thou wert ready to make all sacrifice to thy land, and further, that thou wouldst abide by the counsel

of those free from thy passions, and looking on thee only as the instrument of England's weal."

"Speak on, father," said Harold, turning somewhat pale at the solemnity of the address; "I am ready, if the council so desire, to remain a subject, and aid in the choice of a worthier king."

"Thou divinest me ill," answered Alred; "I do not call on thee to lay aside the crown, but to crucify the heart. The decree of the Witan assigns Mercia and Northumbria to the sons of Algar. The old demarcations of the heptarchy, as thou knowest, are scarce worn out; it is even now less one monarchy, than various states retaining their own laws, and inhabitated by different races, who under the sub-kings, called earls, acknowledge a supreme head in the Basileus of Britain. Mercia hath its March law and its prince; Northumbria its Dane law and its leader. To elect a king without civil war, these realms, for so they are, must unite with and sanction the Witans elsewhere held. Only thus can the kingdom be firm against foes without and anarchy within; and the more so, from the alliance between the new earls of those great provinces and the House of Gryffyth, which still lives in Caradoc his son. What if at Edward's death Mercia and Northumbria refuse to sanction thy accession? What if, when all our force were needed against the Norman, the Welch broke loose from their hills, and the Scots from their moors! Malcolm of Cumbria, now King of Scotland, is Tostig's dearest friend, while his people side with Morcar. Verily these are dangers enow for a new king, even if William's sword slept in its sheath."

"Thou speakest the words of wisdom," said Harold, "but I knew beforehand that he who wears a crown must abjure repose."

"Not so; there is one way, and but one, to reconcile all England to thy dominion—to win to thee not the cold neutrality but the eager zeal of Mercia and Northumbria; to make the first guard thee from the Welch, the last be thy rampart against the Scot. In a word, thou must ally thyself with the blood of these young earls; thou must wed with Aldyth their sister."

The Earl sprang to his feet aghast.

"No—no!" he exclaimed; "not that!—any sacrifice but that!—rather forfeit the throne than resign the heart that leans on mine! Thou knowest my pledge to Edith, my cousin; pledge hallowed by the faith of long years. No—no, have mercy—human mercy; I can wed no other!—any sacrifice but that!"

The good prelate, though not unprepared for this burst, was much moved by its genuine anguish; but, steadfast to his purpose, he resumed:

"Alas, my son, so say we all in the hour of trial—any sacrifice but that which duty and Heaven ordain. Resign the throne thou canst not, or thou leavest the land without a ruler, distracted by rival claims and ambitions, an easy prey to the Norman. Resign thy human affections thou canst and must; and the more, O Harold, that even if duty compelled not this new alliance, the old tie is one of sin, which, as king, and as high example in high place to all men, thy conscience within, and the Church without, summon thee to break. How purify the erring lives of the churchman, if thyself a rebel to the Church? and if thou hast thought that thy power as king might prevail on the Roman Pontiff to grant dispensation for wedlock within the degrees, and that so thou mightest legally confirm thy now illegal troth; bethink thee well, thou hast a more dread and urgent boon now to ask—in ab-

solution from thine oath to William. Both prayers, surely, our Roman father will not grant. Wilt thou choose that which absolves from sin, or that which consults but thy carnal affections?"

Harold covered his face with his hands, and groaned aloud in his strong agony.

"Aid me, Gurth," cried Alred, "thou, sinless and spotless; thou, in whose voice a brother's love can blend with a Christian's zeal; aid me, Gurth, to melt the stubborn, but to comfort the human, heart."

Then Gurth, with a strong effort over himself, knelt by Harold's side, and in strong simple language, backed the representations of the priest. In truth, all argument drawn from reason, whether in the state of the land, or the new duties to which Harold was committed, were on the one side, and unanswerable; on the other, was but that mighty resistance which love opposes ever to reason. And Harold continued to murmur, while his hands concealed his face.

"Impossible!—she who trusted, who trusts—who so loves—she whose whole youth hath been consumed in patient faith in me!—Resign her! and for another! I cannot—I cannot. Take from me the throne!—Oh vain heart of man, that so long desired its own curse!—Crown the Atheling; my manhood shall defend his youth.—But not this offering! No, no—I will not!"

It were tedious to relate the rest of that prolonged and agitated conference. All that night, till the last stars waned, and the bells of prime were heard from church and convent, did the priest and the brother alternately plead and remonstrate, chide and soothe; and still Harold's heart clung to Edith's, with its bleeding roots. At length they, perhaps not unwisely, left

him to himself; and as, whispering low their hopes and their fears of the result of the self-conflict, they went forth from the convent, Haco joined them in the courtyard, and while his cold mournful eye scanned the faces of priest and brother, he asked them "how they had sped?"

Alred shook his head and answered:

"Man's heart is more strong in the flesh than true to the spirit."

"Pardon me, father," said Haco, "if I suggest that your most eloquent and persuasive ally in this, were Edith herself. Start not so incredulously; it is because she loves the Earl more than her own life, that —once show her that the Earl's safety, greatness, honour, duty, lie in release from his troth to her—that nought save his erring love resists your counsels and his country's claims—and Edith's voice will have more power than yours."

The virtuous prelate, more acquainted with man's selfishness than woman's devotion, only replied by an impatient gesture. But Gurth, lately wedded to a woman worthy of him, said gravely:

"Haco speaks well, my father; and methinks it is due to both that Edith should not, unconsulted, be abandoned by him for whom she has abjured all others; to whom she has been as devoted in heart as if sworn wife already. Leave we awhile my brother, never the slave of passion, and with whom England must at last prevail over all selfish thought; and ride we at once to tell to Edith what we have told to him; or rather—woman can best in such a case speak to woman—let us tell all to our Lady—Edward's wife, Harold's sister, and Edith's holy godmother—and abide by her counsel. On the third day we shall return."

"Go we so charged, noble Gurth," said Haco, observing the prelate's reluctant countenance, "and leave we our reverend father to watch over the Earl's sharp struggle."

"Thou speakest well, my son," said the prelate, "and thy mission suits the young and the layman, better than the old and the priest."

"Let us go, Haco," said Gurth, briefly. "Deep, sore, and lasting, is the wound I inflict on the brother of my love; and my own heart bleeds in his; but he himself hath taught me to hold England as a Roman held Rome."

CHAPTER X

It is the nature of that happiness which we derive from our affections to be calm; its immense influence upon our outward life is not known till it is troubled or withdrawn. By placing his heart at peace, man leaves vent to his energies and passions, and permits their current to flow towards the aims and objects which interest labour or arouse ambition. Thus absorbed in the occupation without, he is lulled into a certain forgetfulness of the value of that internal repose which gives health and vigour to the faculties he employs abroad. But once mar this scarce felt, almost invisible harmony, and the discord extends to the remotest chords of our active being. Say to the busiest man whom thou seest in mart, camp, or senate, who seems to thee all intent upon his worldly schemes, "Thy home is reft from thee—thy household gods are shattered—that sweet noiseless content in the regular mechanism of the springs, which set the large wheels of thy soul into movement, is thine nevermore!"—and

straightway all exertion seems robbed of its object—all aim of its alluring charm. "Othello's occupation is gone!" With a start, that man will awaken from the sunlit visions of noontide ambition, and exclaim in his desolation anguish, "What are all the rewards to my labour now thou hast robbed me of repose? How little are all the gains wrung from strife, in a world of rivals and foes, compared to the smile whose sweetness I knew not till it was lost; and the sense of security from mortal ill which I took from the trust and sympathy of love?"

Thus was it with Harold in that bitter and terrible crisis of his fate. This rare and spiritual love, which had existed on hope which had never known fruition, had become the subtlest, the most exquisite part of his being; this love, to the full and holy possession of which, every step in his career seemed to advance him, was it now to be evermore reft from his heart, his existence, at the very moment when he had deemed himself most secure of its rewards—when he most needed its consolations? Hitherto, in that love he had lived in the future—he had silenced the voice of the turbulent human passion by the whisper of the patient angel, "A little while yet, and thy bride sits beside thy throne!" Now what was that future! how joyless! how desolate! The splendour vanished from Ambition—the glow from the face of Fame—the sense of Duty remained alone to counteract the pleadings of Affection; but Duty, no longer dressed in all the gorgeous colourings it took before from glory and power—Duty stern, and harsh, and terrible, as the iron frown of a Grecian Destiny.

And thus, front to front with that Duty, he sate alone one evening, while his lips murmured, "Oh fatal voy-

age, oh lying truth in the hell-born prophecy! this, then, this was the wife my league with the Norman was to win to my arms!" In the streets below were heard the tramp of busy feet hurrying homeward, and the confused uproar of joyous wassail from the various resorts of entertainment crowded by careless revellers. And the tread of steps mounted the stairs without his door, and there paused;—and there was the murmur of two voices without; one the clear voice of Gurth,—one softer and more troubled. The Earl lifted his head from his bosom, and his heart beat quick at the faint and scarce heard sound of that last voice. The door opened gently, gently: a form entered, and halted on the shadow of the threshold; the door closed again by a hand from without. The Earl rose to his feet, tremulously, and the next moment Edith was at his knees; her hood thrown back, her face upturned to his, bright with unfaded beauty, serene with the grandeur of self-martyrdom.

"O Harold!" she exclaimed, "dost thou remember that in the old time I said, 'Edith had loved thee less, if thou hadst not loved England more than Edith?' Recall, recall those words. And deemest thou now that I, who have gazed for years into thy clear soul, and learned there to sun my woman's heart in the light of all glories native to noblest man, deemest thou, O Harold, that I am weaker now than then, when I scarce knew what England and glory were?"

"Edith, Edith, what wouldst thou say?—What knowest thou?—Who hath told thee?—What led thee hither, to take part against thyself?"

"It matters not who told me; I know all. What led me? Mine own soul, and mine own love!" Springing to her feet and clasping his hand in both

hers, while she looked into his face, she resumed: "I do not say to thee, 'Grieve not to part;' for I know too well thy faith, thy tenderness—thy heart, so grand and so soft. But I do say, 'Soar above thy grief, and be more than man for the sake of men!' Yes, Harold, for this last time I behold thee. I clasp thy hand, I lean on thy heart, I hear its beating, and I shall go hence without a tear."

"It cannot, it shall not be!" exclaimed Harold, passionately. "Thou deceivest thyself in the divine passion of the hour: thou canst not foresee the utterness of the desolation to which thou wouldst doom thy life. We were betrothed to each other by ties strong as those of the Church,—over the grave of the dead, under the vault of heaven, in the form of ancestral faith! The bond cannot be broken. If England demands me, let England take me with the ties it were unholy, even for her sake, to rend!"

"Alas, alas!" faltered Edith, while the flush on her cheek sank into mournful paleness. "It is not as thou sayest. So has thy love sheltered me from the world —so utter was my youth's ignorance or my heart's oblivion of the stern laws of man, that when it pleased thee that we should love each other, I could not believe that that love was sin; and that it was sin hitherto I will not think;—*now* it hath become one."

"No, no!" cried Harold; all the eloquence on which thousands had hung, thrilled and spell-bound, deserting him in that hour of need, and leaving to him only broken exclamations,—fragments, in each of which has his heart itself seemed shivered; "no, no,—not sin!—sin only to forsake thee.—Hush! hush!—This is a dream—wait till we wake! True heart! noble soul!—I will not part from thee!"

"But I from thee! And rather than thou shouldst be lost for my sake—the sake of woman—to honour and conscience, and all for which thy sublime life sprang from the hands of Nature—if not the cloister, may I find the grave!—Harold, to the last let me be worthy of thee; and feel, at least, that if not thy wife—that bright, that blessed fate not mine!—still, remembering Edith, just men may say, 'She would not have dishonoured the hearth of Harold!'"

"Dost thou know," said the Earl, striving to speak calmly, "dost thou know that it is not only to resign thee that they demand—that it is to resign thee, and for another?"

"I know it," said Edith; and two burning tears, despite her strong and preternatural self-exaltation, swelled from the dark fringe, and rolled slowly down the colourless cheek, as she added, with proud voice, "I know it: but that other is not Aldyth, it is England! In her, in Aldyth, behold the dear cause of thy native land; with her enweave the love which thy native land should command. So thinking, thou art reconciled, and I consoled. It is not for woman that thou desertest Edith."

"Hear, and take from those lips the strength and the valour that belong to the name of Hero!" said a deep and clear voice behind; and Gurth,—who, whether distrusting the result of an interview so prolonged, or tenderly desirous to terminate its pain, had entered unobserved,—approached, and wound his arm caressingly round his brother. "Oh, Harold!" he said, "dear to me as the drops in my heart is my young bride, newly wed; but if for one tithe of the claims that now call thee to the torture and trial—yea, if but for one hour of good service to freedom and law—I would

consent without a groan to behold her no more. And if men asked me how I could so conquer man's affections, I would point to thee, and say, 'So Harold taught my youth by his lessons, and my manhood by his life.' Before thee, visible, stand Happiness and Love, but with them, Shame; before thee, invisible, stands Woe, but with Woe are England and eternal Glory! Choose between them."

"He hath chosen," said Edith, as Harold turned to the wall, and leaned against it, hiding his face; then, approaching softly, she knelt, lifted to her lips the hem of his robe, and kissed it with devout passion.

Harold turned suddenly, and opened his arms. Edith resisted not that mute appeal; she rose, and fell on his breast, sobbing.

Wild and speechless was that last embrace. The moon, which had witnessed their union by the heathen grave, now rose above the tower of the Christian church, and looked wan and cold upon their parting.

Solemn and clear paused the orb—a cloud passed over the disk—and Edith was gone. The cloud rolled away, and again the moon shone forth; and where had knelt the fair form and looked the last look of Edith, stood the motionless image, and gazed the solemn eye, of the dark son of Sweyn. But Harold leant on the breast of Gurth, and saw not who had supplanted the soft and loving Fylgia of his life—saw nought in the universe but the blank of desolation!

BOOK XI

THE NORMAN SCHEMER, AND THE NORWEGIAN SEA-KING

CHAPTER I

It was the eve of the 5th of January—the eve of the day announced to King Edward as that of his deliverance from earth; and whether or not the prediction had wrought its own fulfilment on the fragile frame and susceptible nerves of the King, the last of the line of Cerdic was fast passing into the solemn shades of eternity.

Without the walls of the palace, through the whole city of London, the excitement was indescribable. All the river before the palace was crowded with boats; all the broad space on the Isle of Thorney itself, thronged with anxious groups. But a few days before the new-built Abbey had been solemnly consecrated; with the completion of that holy edifice, Edward's life itself seemed done. Like the kings of Egypt, he had built his tomb.

Within the palace, if possible, still greater was the agitation, more dread the suspense. Lobbies, halls, corridors, stairs, ante-rooms, were filled with churchmen and thegns. Nor was it alone for news of the King's state that their brows were so knit, that their breath came and went so short. It is not when a great chief is dying, that men compose their minds to de-

plore a loss. That comes long after, when the worm is at its work, and comparison between the dead and the living often rights the one to wrong the other. But while the breath is struggling, and the eye glazing, life, busy in the bystanders, murmurs, "Who shall be the heir?" And, in this instance, never had suspense been so keenly wrought up into hope and terror. For the news of Duke William's designs had now spread far and near; and awful was the doubt, whether the abhorred Norman should receive his sole sanction to so arrogant a claim from the parting assent of Edward. Although, as we have seen, the crown was not absolutely within the bequests of a dying king, but at the will of the Witan, still, in circumstances so unparalleled, the utter failure of all natural heirs, save a boy feeble in mind as body, and half foreign by birth and rearing; the love borne by Edward to the Church; and the sentiments, half of pity half of reverence, with which he was regarded throughout the land;—his dying word would go far to influence the council and select the successor. Some whispering to each other, with pale lips, all the dire predictions then current in men's mouths and breasts; some in moody silence; all lifted eager eyes, as, from time to time, a gloomy Benedictine passed in the direction to or fro the King's chamber.

In that chamber, traversing the past of eight centuries, enter we with hushed and noiseless feet—a room known to us in many a later scene and legend of England's troubled history, as "THE PAINTED CHAMBER," long called "THE CONFESSOR'S." At the farthest end of that long and lofty space, raised upon a regal platform, and roofed with regal canopy, was the bed of death.

At the foot stood Harold; on one side knelt Edith, the King's lady; at the other Alred; while Stigand stood near—the holy rood in his hand—and the abbot of the new monastery of Westminster by Stigand's side; and all the greatest thegns, including Morcar and Edwin, Gurth and Leofwine, all the more illustrious prelates and abbots, stood also on the daïs.

In the lower end of the hall, the King's physician was warming a cordial over the brazier, and some of the subordinate officers of the household were standing in the niches of the deep-set windows; and they —not great eno' for other emotions than those of human love for their kindly lord—*they* wept.

The King, who had already undergone the last holy offices of the Church, was lying quite quiet, his eyes half closed, breathing low but regularly. He had been speechless the two preceding days; on this he had uttered a few words, which showed returning consciousness. His hand, reclined on the coverlid, was clasped in his wife's who was praying fervently. Something in the touch of her hand, or the sound of her murmur, stirred the King from the growing lethargy, and his eyes opening, fixed on the kneeling lady.

"Ah?" said he faintly, "ever good, ever meek! Think not I did not love thee; hearts will be read yonder; we shall have our guerdon."

The lady looked up through her streaming tears. Edward released his hand, and laid it on her head as in benediction. Then motioning to the abbot of Westminster, he drew from his finger the ring which the palmers had brought to him,[1] and murmured scarce audibly:

"Be this kept in the House of St. Peter in memory of me!"

[1] Brompt. Chron.

"He is alive now to us—speak—" whispered more than one thegn, one abbot, to Alred and to Stigand. And Stigand, as the harder and more worldly man of the two, moved up, and bending over the pillow, between Alred and the King, said:

"O royal son, about to win the crown to which that of earth is but an idiot's wreath of withered leaves, not yet may thy soul forsake us. Whom commendest thou to us as shepherd to thy bereaven flock? whom shall we admonish to tread in those traces thy footsteps leave below?"

The King made a slight gesture of impatience; and the Queen, forgetful of all but her womanly sorrow, raised her eye and finger in reproof that the dying was thus disturbed. But the stake was too weighty, the suspense too keen, for that reverent delicacy in those around; and the thegns pressed on each other, and a murmur rose, which murmured the name of Harold.

"Bethink thee, my son," said Alred, in a tender voice tremulous with emotion; "the young Atheling is too much an infant yet for these anxious times."

Edward signed his head in assent.

"Then," said the Norman bishop of London, who till that moment had stood in the rear, almost forgotten amongst the crowd of Saxon prelates, but who himself had been all eyes and ears. "Then," said Bishop William, advancing, "if thine own royal line so fail, who so near to thy love, who so worthy to succeed, as William thy cousin, the Count of the Normans?"

Dark was the scowl on the brow of every thegn, and a muttered "No, no: never the Norman!" was heard distinctly. Harold's face flushed, and his hand was

on the hilt of his ateghar. But no other sign gave he of his interest in the question.

The King lay for some moments silent, but evidently striving to re-collect his thoughts. Meanwhile the two archprelates bent over him—Stigand eagerly, Alred fondly.

Then raising himself on one arm, while with the other he pointed to Harold at the foot of the bed, the King said:

"Your hearts, I see, are with Harold the Earl: so be it."

At those words he fell back on his pillow; a loud shriek burst from his wife's lips; all crowded around; he lay as the dead.

At the cry, and the indescribable movement of the throng, the physician came quick from the lower part of the hall. He made his way abruptly to the bedside, and said chidingly, "Air, give him air." The throng parted, the leach moistened the King's pale lips with the cordial, but no breath seemed to come forth, no pulse seemed to beat; and while the two prelates knelt before the human body and by the blessed rood, the rest descended the daïs, and hastened to depart. Harold only remained; but he had passed from the foot to the head of the bed.

The crowd had gained the centre of the hall, when a sound that startled them as if it had come from the grave, chained every footstep—the sound of the King's voice, loud, terribly distinct, and full, as with the vigour of youth restored. All turned their eyes, appalled: all stood spellbound.

There sate the King upright on the bed, his face seen above the kneeling prelates, and his eyes bright and shining down the Hall.

"Yea," he said, deliberately, "yea, as this shall be a real vision or a false illusion, grant me, Almighty One, the power of speech to tell it."

He paused a moment, and thus resumed:

"It was on the banks of the frozen Seine, this day thirty-and-one winters ago, that two holy monks, to whom the gift of prophecy was vouchsafed, told me of direful woes that should fall on England: 'For God,' said they, 'after thy death, has delivered England into the hand of the enemy, and fiends shall wander over the land.' Then I asked in my sorrow, 'Can nought avert the doom? and may not my people free themselves by repentance, like the Ninevites of old?' And the Prophets answered, 'Nay, nor shall the calamity cease, and the curse be completed, till a green tree be sundered in twain, and the part cut off be carried away; yet move, of itself, to the ancient trunk, unite to the stem, bud out with the blossom, and stretch forth its fruit.' So said the monks, and even now, ere I spoke, I saw them again, there, standing mute, and with the paleness of dead men, by the side of my bed!"

These words were said so calmly, and as it were so rationally, that their import became doubly awful from the cold precision of the tone. A shudder passed through the assembly, and each man shrunk from the King's eye, which seemed to each man to dwell on himself. Suddenly that eye altered in its cold beam; suddenly the voice changed its deliberate accent; the grey hairs seemed to bristle erect, the whole face to work with horror; the arms stretched forth, the form writhed on the couch, distorted fragments from the lips: "*Sanguelac! Sanguelac!*—the Lake of Blood," shrieked forth the dying King, "the Lord hath bent

his bow—the Lord hath bared his sword. He comes down as a warrior to war, and his wrath is in the steel and the flame. He boweth the mountains, and comes down, and darkness is under his feet!"

As if revived but for these tremendous denunciations, while the last word left his lips the frame collapsed, the eyes set, and the King fell a corpse in the arms of Harold.

But one smile of the sceptic or the world-man was seen on the paling lips of those present: that smile was not on the lips of warriors and men of mail. It distorted the sharpened features of Stigand, the world-man and the miser, as, passing down, and amidst the group, he said, "Tremble ye at the dreams of a sick old man?"[1]

CHAPTER II

The time of year customary for the National Assembly; the recent consecration of Westminster, for which Edward had convened all his chief spiritual lords, the anxiety felt for the infirm state of the King, and the interest as to the impending succession—all concurred to permit the instantaneous meeting of a Witan worthy, from rank and numbers, to meet the emergency of the time, and proceed to the most momentous election ever yet known in England. The thegns and prelates met in haste. Harold's marriage with Aldyth, which had taken place but a few weeks before, had united all parties with his own; not a claim counter to the great Earl's was advanced; the choice was unanimous. The necessity of terminating at such a crisis all suspense throughout the kingdom,

[1] See Note P.

and extinguishing the danger of all counter intrigues, forbade to men thus united any delay in solemnising their decision; and the august obsequies of Edward were followed on the same day by the coronation of Harold.

It was in the body of the mighty Abbey Church, not indeed as we see it now, after successive restorations and remodellings, but simple in its long rows of Saxon arch and massive column, blending the first Teuton with the last Roman masonries, that the crowd of the Saxon freemen assembled to honour the monarch of their choice. First Saxon king, since England had been one monarchy, selected not from the single House of Cerdic—first Saxon king, not led to the throne by the pale shades of fabled ancestors tracing their descent from the Father-God of the Teuton, but by the spirits that never know a grave—the archeternal givers of crowns, and founders of dynasties—Valour and Fame.

Alred and Stigand, the two great prelates of the realm, had conducted Harold to the church,[1] and up the aisle to the altar, followed by the chiefs of the Witan in their long robes; and the clergy with their abbots and bishops sung the anthems—"*Fermetur manus tua*," and "*Gloria Patri*."

[1] It seems by the coronation service of Ethelred II. still extant, that two bishops officiated in the crowning of the King; and hence, perhaps, the discrepancy in the chronicles, some contending that Harold was crowned by Alred, others, by Stigand. It is noticeable, however, that it is the apologists of the Normans who assign that office to Stigand, who was in disgrace with the Pope, and deemed no lawful bishop. Thus in the Bayeux tapestry the label, "Stigand," is significantly affixed to the officiating prelate, as if to convey insinuation that Harold was not lawfully crowned. Florence, by far the best authority, says distinctly, that Harold was crowned by Alred. The ceremonial of the coronation described in the text, is for the most part given on the authority of the "Cotton MS." quoted by Sharon Turner, vol. iii. p. 151.

And now the music ceased; Harold prostrated himself before the altar, and the sacred melody burst forth with the great hymn, "*Te Deum.*"

As it ceased, prelate and thegn raised their chief from the floor, and in imitation of the old custom of Teuton and Northman—when the lord of their armaments was borne on shoulder and shield—Harold mounted a platform, and rose in full view of the crowd.

"Thus," said the arch-prelate, "we choose Harold son of Godwin for lord and for king." And the thegns drew round, and placed hand on Harold's knee, and cried aloud, "We choose thee, O Harold, for lord and for king." And row by row, line by line, all the multitude shouted forth, "We choose thee, O Harold, for lord and king." So there he stood with his calm brow, facing all, Monarch of England, and Basileus of Britain.

Now unheeded amidst the throng, and leaning against a column in the arches of the aisle, was a woman with her veil round her face; and she lifted the veil for a moment to gaze on that lofty brow, and the tears were streaming fast down her cheek, but her face was not sad.

"Let the vulgar not see, to pity or scorn thee, daughter of kings as great as he who abandons and forsakes thee!" murmured a voice in her ear; and the form of Hilda, needing no support from column or wall, rose erect by the side of Edith. Edith bowed her head and lowered the veil, as the King descended the platform and stood again by the altar, while clear through the hushed assembly rang the words of his triple promise to his people:

"Peace to His Church and the Christian flock.

"Interdict of rapacity and injustice.

"Equity and mercy in his judgments, as God the gracious and just might show mercy to him."

And deep from the hearts of thousands came the low "Amen."

Then after a short prayer, which each prelate repeated, the crowd saw afar the glitter of the crown held over the head of the King. The voice of the consecrator was heard, low till it came to the words "So potently and royally may he rule, against all visible and invisible foes, that the royal throne of the Angles and Saxons may not desert his sceptre."

As the prayer ceased, came the symbolical rite of anointment. Then pealed the sonorous organ,[1] and solemn along the aisles rose the anthem that closed with the chorus which the voice of the multitude swelled, "May the King live for ever!" Then the crown that had gleamed in the trembling hand of the prelate, rested firm in its splendour on the front of the King. And the sceptre of rule, and the rod of justice, "to soothe the pious and terrify the bad," were placed in the royal hands. And the prayer and the blessings were renewed,—till the close; "Bless, Lord, the courage of this Prince, and prosper the works of his hand. With his horn, as the horn of the rhinoceros, may he blow the waters to the extremities of the earth; and may He who has ascended to the skies be his aid for ever!"

Then Hilda stretched forth her hand to lead Edith from the place. But Edith shook her head and murmured:

"But once again, but once!" and with involuntary step moved on.

[1] Introduced into our churches in the ninth century.

The King swept on and saw her not.

Suddenly, close where she paused, the crowd parted, and down the narrow lane so formed amidst the wedged and breathless crowd came the august procession;—prelate and thegn swept on from the church to the palace; and alone, with firm and measured step, the diadem on his brow, the sceptre in his hand, came the King. Edith checked the rushing impulse at her heart, but she bent forward, with veil half drawn aside, and so gazed on that face and form of more than royal majesty, fondly, proudly. The King swept on and saw her not; love lived no more for him.

CHAPTER III

The boat shot over the royal Thames. Borne along the waters, the shouts and the hymns of swarming thousands from the land shook, like a blast, the gelid air of the Wolf-month. All space seemed filled and noisy with the name of Harold the King. Fast rowed the rowers,—on shot the boat; and Hilda's face, stern and ominous, turned to the still towers of the palace, gleaming wide and white in the wintry sun. Suddenly Edith lifted her hand from her bosom, and said passionately:

"O mother of my mother, I cannot live again in the house where the very walls speak to me of him; all things chain my soul to the earth; and my soul should be in heaven, that its prayers may be heard by the heedful angels. The day that the holy Lady of England predicted hath come to pass, and the silver cord is loosed at last. Ah why, why did I not believe her then? why did I then reject the cloister? Yet no, I will not repent; at least I have been loved!

But now I will go to the nunnery of Waltham, and kneel at the altars *he* hath hallowed to the mone and the monechyn."

"Edith," said the Vala, "thou wilt not bury thy life yet young in the living grave! And, despite all that now severs you—yea, despite Harold's new and loveless ties—still clearer than ever it is written in the heavens, that a day *shall* come, in which you are to be evermore united. Many of the shapes I have seen, many of the sounds I have heard, in the trance and the dream, fade in the troubled memory of waking life. But never yet hath grown doubtful or dim the prophecy, that the truth pledged by the grave shall be fulfilled."

"Oh, tempt not! Oh, delude not!" cried Edith, while the blood rushed over her brow. "Thou knowest this cannot be. Another's! he is another's! and in the words thou hast uttered there is deadly sin."

"There is no sin in the resolves of a fate that rules us in spite of ourselves. Tarry only till the year bring round the birth-day of Harold; for my sayings shall be ripe with the grape, and when the feet of the vine-herd are red in the Month of the Vine,[1] the Nornas shall knit ye together again!"

Edith clasped her hands mutely, and looked hard into the face of Hilda,—looked and shuddered she knew not why.

The boat landed on the eastern shore of the river, beyond the walls of the city, and then Edith bent her way to the holy walls of Waltham. The frost was sharp in the glitter of the unwarming sun; upon leafless boughs hung the barbed ice-gems; and the crown was on the brows of Harold! and at night, within the

[1] The Wyn-month: October.

walls of the convent, Edith heard the hymns of the kneeling monks; and the blasts howled, and the storm arose, and the voices of destroying hurricanes were blent with the swell of the choral hymns.

CHAPTER IV

Tostig sate in the halls of Bruges, and with him sate Judith, his haughty wife. The Earl and his Countess were playing at chess, (or the game resembling it, which amused the idlesse of that age,) and the Countess had put her lord's game into mortal disorder, when Tostig swept his hand over the board, and the pieces rolled on the floor.

"That is one way to prevent defeat," said Judith, with a half smile and half frown.

"It is the way of the bold and the wise, wife mine," answered Tostig, rising, "let all be destruction where thou thyself canst win not! Peace to these trifles! I cannot keep my mind to the mock fight; it flies to the real. Our last news sours the taste of the wine, and steals the sleep from my couch. It says that Edward cannot live through the winter, and that all men bruit abroad, there can be no king save Harold my brother."

"And will thy brother as King give to thee again thy domain as Earl?"

"He must!" answered Tostig, "and, despite all our breaches, with soft message he will. For Harold has the heart of the Saxon, to which the sons of one father are dear; and Githa, my mother, when we first fled, controlled the voice of my revenge, and bade me wait patient and hope yet."

Scarce had these words fallen from Tostig's lips, when the chief of his Danish house-carles came in, and announced the arrival of a bode from England.

"His news? his news?" cried the Earl, "with his own lips let him speak his news."

The house-carle withdrew but to usher in the messenger, an Anglo-Dane.

"The weight on thy brow shows the load on thy heart," cried Tostig. "Speak, and be brief."

"Edward is dead."

"Ha! and who reigns?"

"Thy brother is chosen and crowned."

The face of the Earl grew red and pale in a breath, and successive emotions of envy and old rivalship, humbled pride and fierce discontent, passed across his turbulent heart. But these died away as the predominant thought of self-interest, and somewhat of that admiration for success which often seems like magnanimity in grasping minds, and something too of haughty exultation, that he stood a King's brother in the halls of his exile, came to chase away the more hostile and menacing feelings. Then Judith approached with joy on her brow, and said:

"We shall no more eat the bread of dependence even at the hand of a father; and since Harold hath no dam to proclaim to the Church, and to place on the daïs, thy wife, O my Tostig, will have state in far England little less than her sister in Rouen."

"Methinks so will it be," said Tostig. "How now, nuncius? why lookest thou so grim, and why shakest thou thy head?"

"Small chance for thy dame to keep state in the halls of the King; small hope for thyself to win back thy broad earldom. But a few weeks ere thy brother

won the crown, he won also a bride in the house of thy spoiler and foe. Aldyth, the sister of Edwin and Morcar, is Lady of England; and that union shuts thee out from Northumbria for ever."

At these words, as if stricken by some deadly and inexpressible insult, the Earl recoiled, and stood a moment mute with rage and amaze. His singular beauty became distorted into the lineaments of a fiend. He stamped with his foot, as he thundered a terrible curse. Then haughtily waving his hand to the bode, in sign of dismissal, he strode to and fro the room in gloomy perturbation.

Judith, like her sister Matilda, a woman fierce and vindictive, continued, by that sharp venom that lies in the tongue of the sex, to incite still more the intense resentment of her lord. Perhaps some female jealousies of Aldyth might contribute to increase her own indignation. But without such frivolous addition to anger, there was cause eno' in this marriage thoroughly to complete the alienation between the King and his brother. It was impossible that one so revengeful as Tostig should not cherish the deepest animosity, not only against the people that had rejected, but the new Earl that had succeeded him. In wedding the sister of this fortunate rival and despoiler, Harold could not, therefore, but gall him in his most sensitive sores of soul. The King, thus, formally approved and sanctioned his ejection, solemnly took part with his foe, robbed him of all legal chance of recovering his dominions, and, in the words of the bode, "shut him out from Northumbria for ever." Nor was this even all. Grant his return to England; grant a reconciliation with Harold; still those abhorred and more fortunate enemies, necessarily made now the

most intimate part of the King's family, must be most in his confidence, would curb and chafe and encounter Tostig in every scheme for his personal aggrandisement. His foes, in a word, were in the camp of his brother.

While gnashing his teeth with a wrath the more deadly because he saw not yet his way to retribution, —Judith, pursuing the separate thread of her own cogitations, said:

"And if my sister's lord, the Count of the Normans, had, as rightly he ought to have, succeeded his cousin the Monk-king, then I should have a sister on the throne, and thou in her husband a brother more tender than Harold. One who supports his barons with sword and mail, and gives the villeins rebelling against them but the brand and the cord."

"Ho!" cried Tostig, stopping suddenly in his disordered strides, "kiss me, wife, for those words! They have helped thee to power, and lit me to revenge. If thou wouldst send love to thy sister, take graphium and parchment, and write fast as a scribe. Ere the sun is an hour older, I am on my road to Count William."

CHAPTER V

The Duke of the Normans was in the forest, or park land, of Rouvray, and his Quens and his knights stood around him, expecting some new proof of his strength and his skill with the bow. For the Duke was trying some arrows, a weapon he was ever employed in seeking to improve; sometimes shortening, sometimes lengthening, the shaft; and suiting the wing of the feather, and the weight of the point, to the nicest

refinement in the law of mechanics. Gay and debonair, in the brisk fresh air of the frosty winter, the great Count jested and laughed as the squires fastened a live bird by the string to a stake in the distant sward; and "*Pardex*," said Duke William, "Conan of Bretagne, and Philip of France, leave us now so unkindly in peace, that I trow we shall never again have larger butt for our arrows than the breast of yon poor plumed trembler."

As the Duke spoke and laughed, all the sere boughs behind him rattled and cranched, and a horse at full speed came rushing over the hard rime of the sward. The Duke's smile vanished in the frown of his pride. "Bold rider and graceless," quoth he, "who thus comes in the presence of counts and princes?"

Right up to Duke William spurred the rider, and then leaped from his steed; vest and mantle, yet more rich than the Duke's, all tattered and soiled. No knee bent the rider, no cap did he doff; but seizing the startled Norman with the gripe of a hand as strong as his own, he led him aside from the courtiers, and said:

"Thou knowest me, William? though not thus alone should I come to thy court, if I did not bring thee a crown."

"Welcome, brave Tostig!" said the Duke, marvelling. "What meanest thou? nought but good, by thy words and thy smile."

"Edward sleeps with the dead!—and Harold is King of all England!"

"King! — England! — King!" faltered William, stammering in his agitation. "Edward dead!—Saints rest him! England then is *mine!* King!—*I* am the

King! Harold hath sworn it; my Quens and prelates heard him; the bones of the saints attest the oath!"

"Somewhat of this have I vaguely learned from our *beau-père* Count Baldwin; more will I learn at thy leisure; but take meanwhile, my word as *Miles* and *Saxon*,—never, while there is breath on his lips, or one beat in his heart, will my brother, Lord Harold, give an inch of English land to the Norman."

William turned pale and faint with emotion, and leant for support against a leafless oak.

Busy were the rumours, and anxious the watch, of the Quens and knights, as their Prince stood long in the distant glade, conferring with the rider, whom one or two of them had recognised as Tostig, the spouse of Matilda's sister.

At length, side by side, still talking earnestly, they regained the group; and William, summoning the Lord of Tancarville, bade him conduct Tostig to Rouen, the towers of which rose through the forest trees. "Rest and refresh thee, noble kinsman," said the Duke; "see and talk with Matilda. I will join thee anon."

The Earl remounted his steed, and saluting the company with a wild and hasty grace, soon vanished amidst the groves.

Then William, seating himself on the sward, mechanically unstrung his bow, sighing oft, and oft frowning; and without vouchsafing other word to his lords than "No further sport to-day!" rose slowly, and went alone through the thickest parts of the forest. But his faithful Fitzosborne marked his gloom, and fondly followed him. The Duke arrived at the borders of the Seine, where his galley waited him. He entered, sat down on the bench, and took no

notice of Fitzosborne, who quietly stepped in after his lord, and placed himself on another bench.

The little voyage to Rouen was performed in silence, and as soon as he had gained his palace, without seeking either Tostig or Matilda, the Duke turned into the vast hall, in which he was wont to hold council with his barons; and walked to and fro "often," say the chronicles, "changing posture and attitude, and oft loosening and tightening, and drawing into knots, the strings of his mantle."

Fitzosborne, meanwhile, had sought the ex-Earl, who was closeted with Matilda; and now returning, he went boldly up to the Duke, whom no one else dared approach, and said:

"Why, my liege, seek to conceal what is already known—what ere the eve will be in the mouths of all? You are troubled that Edward is dead, and that Harold, violating his oath, has seized the English realm."

"Truly," said the Duke mildly, and with the tone of a meek man much injured; "my dear cousin's death, and the wrongs I have received from Harold, touch me nearly."

Then said Fitzosborne, with that philosophy, half grave as became the Scandinavian, half gay as became the Frank: "No man should grieve for what he can help—still less for what he cannot help. For Edward's death, I trow, remedy there is none; but for Harold's treason, yea! Have you not a noble host of knights and warriors? What want you to destroy the Saxon and seize his realm? What but a bold heart? A great deed once well begun, is half done. Begin, Count of the Normans, and we will complete the rest."

Starting from his sorely tasked dissimulation; for

all William needed, and all of which he doubted, was the aid of his haughty barons; the Duke raised his head, and his eyes shone out.

"Ha, sayest thou so! then, by the Splendour of God, we will do this deed. Haste thou—rouse hearts, nerve hands—promise, menace, win! Broad are the lands of England, and generous a conqueror's hand. Go and prepare all my faithful lords for a council, nobler than ever yet stirred the hearts and strung the hands of the sons of Rou."

CHAPTER VI

Brief was the sojourn of Tostig at the court of Rouen; speedily made the contract between the grasping Duke and the revengeful traitor. All that had been promised to Harold, was now pledged to Tostig—if the last would assist the Norman to the English throne.

At heart, however, Tostig was ill satisfied. His chance conversations with the principal barons, who seemed to look upon the conquest of England as the dream of a madman, showed him how doubtful it was that William could induce his Quens to a service, to which the tenure of their fiefs did not appear to compel them; and at all events, Tostig prognosticated delays, that little suited his fiery impatience. He accepted the offer of some two or three ships, which William put at his disposal, under pretence to reconnoitre the Northumbrian coasts, and there attempt a rising in his own favour. But his discontent was increased by the smallness of the aid afforded him; for William, ever suspicious, distrusted both his faith and

his power. Tostig, with all his vices, was a poor dissimulator, and his sullen spirit betrayed itself when he took leave of his host.

"Chance what may," said the fierce Saxon, "no stranger shall seize the English crown without my aid. I offer it first to thee. But thou must come to take it in time, or——"

"Or what?" asked the Duke, gnawing his lip.

"Or the Father race of Rou will be before thee! My horse paws without. Farewell to thee, Norman; sharpen thy swords, hew out thy vessels, and goad thy slow barons."

Scarce had Tostig departed, ere William began to repent that he had so let him depart: but seeking counsel of Lanfranc, that wise minister reassured him.

"Fear no rival, son and lord," said he. "The bones of the dead are on thy side, and little thou knowest, as yet, how mighty their fleshless arms! All Tostig can do is to distract the forces of Harold. Leave him to work out his worst; nor then be in haste. Much hath yet to be done—cloud must gather and fire must form, ere the bolt can be launched. Send to Harold mildly, and gently remind him of oath and of relics—of treaty and pledge. Put right on thy side, and then——"

"Ah, what then?"

"Rome shall curse the forsworn—Rome shall hallow thy banner; this be no strife of force against force, but a war of religion; and thou shalt have on thy side the conscience of man, and the arm of the Church."

Meanwhile, Tostig embarked at Harfleur; but instead of sailing to the northern coasts of England, he made for one of the Flemish ports: and there, under various pretences, new manned the Norman vessels

with Flemings, Fins, and Northmen. His meditations during his voyage had decided him not to trust to William; and he now bent his course, with fair wind and favouring weather, to the shores of his maternal uncle, King Sweyn of Denmark.

In truth, to all probable calculation, his change of purpose was politic. The fleets of England were numerous, and her seamen renowned. The Normans had neither experience nor fame in naval fights; their navy itself was scarcely formed. Thus, even William's landing in England was an enterprise arduous and dubious. Moreover, even granting the amplest success, would not this Norman Prince, so profound and ambitious, be a more troublesome lord to Earl Tostig than his own uncle Sweyn?

So, forgetful of the compact at Rouen, no sooner had the Saxon lord come in presence of the King of the Danes, than he urged on his kinsman the glory of winning again the sceptre of Canute.

A brave, but a cautious and wily veteran, was King Sweyn; and a few days before Tostig arrived, he had received letters from his sister Githa, who, true to Godwin's command, had held all that Harold did and counselled, as between himself and his brother, wise and just. These letters had placed the Dane on his guard, and shown him the true state of affairs in England. So King Sweyn, smiling, thus answered his nephew Tostig:

"A great man was Canute, a small man am I: scarce can I keep my Danish dominion from the gripe of the Norwegian, while Canute took Norway without slash and blow;[1] but great as he was, England cost him hard fighting to win, and sore peril to keep. Where-

[1] "Snorro Sturleson." Laing.

fore, best for the small man to rule by the light of his own little sense, nor venture to count on the luck of great Canute;—for luck but goes with the great."

"Thine answer," said Tostig, with a bitter sneer, "is not what I expected from an uncle and warrior. But other chiefs may be found less afraid of the luck of high deeds."

"So," saith the Norwegian chronicler, "not just the best friends, the Earl left the King," and went on in haste to Harold Hardrada of Norway.

True Hero of the North, true darling of War and of Song, was Harold Hardrada! At the terrible battle of Stiklestad, at which his brother, St. Olave, had fallen, he was but fifteen years of age, but his body was covered with the wounds of a veteran. Escaping from the field, he lay concealed in the house of a Bonder peasant, remote in deep forests, till his wounds were healed. Thence, chaunting by the way, (for a poet's soul burned bright in Hardrada,) "That a day would come when his name would be great in the land he now left," he went on into Sweden, thence into Russia, and after wild adventures in the East, joined, with the bold troop he had collected around him, that famous body-guard of the Greek emperors,[1] called the Væringers, and of these he became the chief. Jealousies between himself and the Greek General of the Imperial forces, (whom the Norwegian chronicler calls

[1] The Væringers, or Varangi, mostly Northmen; this redoubtable force, the Janissaries of the Byzantine empire, afforded brilliant field, both of fortune and war, to the discontented spirits, or outlawed heroes of the North. It was joined afterwards by many of the bravest and best born of the Saxon nobles, refusing to dwell under the yoke of the Norman. Scott, in "Count Robert of Paris," which, if not one of his best romances, is yet full of truth and beauty, has described this renowned band with much poetical vigor and historical fidelity.

Gyrger,) ended in Harold's retirement with his Væringers into the Saracen land of Africa. Eighty castles stormed and taken, vast plunder in gold and in jewels, and nobler meed in the song of the Scald and the praise of the brave, attested the prowess of the great Scandinavian. New laurels, blood-stained, new treasures, sword-won, awaited him in Sicily; and thence, rough foretype of the coming crusader, he passed on to Jerusalem. His sword swept before him Moslem and robber. He bathed in Jordan, and knelt at the Holy Cross.

Returned to Constantinople, the desire for his northern home seized Hardrada. There he heard that his nephew Magnus, the illegitimate son of St. Olave, had become King of Norway,—and he himself aspired to a throne. So he gave up his command under Zoe the empress; but, if Scald be believed, Zoe the empress loved the bold chief, whose heart was set on Maria her niece. To detain Hardrada, a charge of malappropriation, whether of pay or of booty, was brought against him. He was cast into prison. But when the brave are in danger, the saints send the fair to their help! Moved by a holy dream, a Greek lady lowered ropes from the roof of the tower to the dungeon wherein Hardrada was cast. He escaped from the prison, he aroused his Væringers, they flocked round their chief; he went to the house of his lady Maria, bore her off to the galley, put out into the Black Sea, reached Novgorod, (at the friendly court of whose king he had safely lodged his vast spoils,) sailed home to the north: and, after such feats as became sea-king of old, received half of Norway from Magnus, and on the death of his nephew the whole of that kingdom passed to his sway. A king so wise and so wealthy,

so bold and so dread, had never yet been known in the north. And this was the king to whom came Tostig the Earl, with the offer of England's crown.

It was one of the glorious nights of the north, and winter had already begun to melt into early spring, when two men sate under a kind of rustic porch of rough pine-logs, not very unlike those seen now in Switzerland and the Tyrol. This porch was constructed before a private door, to the rear of a long, low, irregular building of wood which enclosed two or more court-yards, and covering an immense space of ground. This private door seemed placed for the purpose of immediate descent to the sea; for the ledge of the rock over which the log-porch spread its rude roof, jutted over the ocean; and from it a rugged stair, cut through the crag, descended to the beach. The shore, with bold, strange, grotesque slab, and peak, and splinter, curved into a large creek; and close under the cliff were moored seven war-ships, high and tall, with prows and sterns all gorgeous with gilding in the light of the splendid moon. And that rude timber house, which seemed but a chain of barbarian huts linked into one, was a land palace of Hardrada of Norway; but the true halls of his royalty, the true seats of his empire, were the decks of those lofty war-ships.

Through the small lattice-work of the windows of the log-house, lights blazed; from the roof-top smoke curled; from the hall on the other side of the dwelling, came the din of tumultuous wassail, but the intense stillness of the outer air, hushed in frost, and luminous with stars, contrasted and seemed to rebuke the gross sounds of human revel. And that northern night seemed almost as bright as (but how much more augustly calm, than) the noon of the golden south!

On a table within the ample porch was an immense bowl of birchwood, mounted in silver, and filled with potent drink, and two huge horns, of size suiting the mighty wassailers of the age. The two men seemed to care nought for the stern air of the cold night—true that they were wrapped in furs reft from the Polar bear. But each had hot thoughts within, that gave greater warmth to the veins than the bowl or the bear-skin.

They were host and guest; and as if with the restlessness of his thoughts, the host arose from his seat, and passed through the porch and stood on the bleak rock under the light of the moon; and so seen, he seemed scarcely human, but some war-chief of the farthest time,—yea, of a time ere the deluge had shivered those rocks, and left beds on the land for the realm of that icy sea. For Harold Hardrada was in height above all the children of modern men. Five ells of Norway made the height of Harold Hardrada.[1] Nor was this stature accompanied by any of those imperfections in symmetry, nor by that heaviness of aspect, which generally render any remarkable excess above human stature and strength rather monstrous than commanding. On the contrary, his proportions were just; his appearance noble; and the sole defect that the chronicler remarks in his shape, was "that

[1] Laing's Snorro Sturleson.—"The old Norwegian ell was less than the present ell; and Thorlasius reckons, in a note on this chapter, that Harold's stature would be about four Danish ells; viz. about eight feet."—Laing's note to the text. Allowing for the exaggeration of the chronicler, it seems probable, at least, that Hardrada exceeded seven feet. Since (as Laing remarks in the same note), and as we shall see hereafter, "our English Harold offered him, according to both English and Danish authority, seven feet of land for a grave, or *as much more* as his stature, exceeding that of other men, might require."

his hands and feet were large, but these were well made." [1]

His face had all the fair beauty of the Norseman; his hair, parted in locks of gold over a brow that bespoke the daring of the warrior and the genius of the bard, fell in glittering profusion to his shoulders; a short beard and long moustache of the same colour as the hair, carefully trimmed, added to the grand and masculine beauty of the countenance, in which the only blemish was the peculiarity of one eyebrow being somewhat higher than the other,[2] which gave something more sinister to his frown, something more arch to his smile. For, quick of impulse, the Poet-Titan smiled and frowned often.

Harold Hardrada stood in the light of the moon, and gazing thoughtfully on the luminous sea. Tostig marked him for some moments where he sate in the porch, and then rose and joined him.

"Why should my words so disturb thee, O King of the Norsemen?"

"Is glory, then, a drug that soothes to sleep?" returned the Norwegian.

"I like thine answer," said Tostig, smiling, "and I like still more to watch thine eye gazing on the prows of thy war-ships. Strange indeed it were if thou, who hast been fighting fifteen years for the petty kingdom of Denmark, shouldst hesitate now, when all England lies before thee to seize."

"I hesitate," replied the King, "because he whom Fortune has befriended so long, should beware how he strain her favour too far. Eighteen pitched battles fought I in the Saracen land, and in every one was a victor—never, at home or abroad, have I known

[1] Snorro Sturleson. See Note Q. [2] Snorro Sturleson.

shame and defeat. Doth the wind always blow from one point?—and is Fate less unstable than the wind?"

"Now, out on thee, Harold Hardrada," said Tostig the fierce; "the good pilot wins his way through all winds, and the brave heart fastens fate to its flag. All men allow that the North never had warrior like thee; and now, in the mid-day of manhood, wilt thou consent to repose on the mere triumph of youth?"

"Nay," said the King, who, like all true poets, had something of the deep sense of a sage, and was, indeed, regarded as the most prudent as well as the most adventurous chief in the Northland,—"nay, it is not by such words, which my soul seconds too well, that thou canst entrap a ruler of men. Thou must show me the chances of success, as thou wouldst to a grey-beard. For we should be as old men before we engage, and as youths when we wish to perform."

Then the traitor succinctly detailed all the weak points in the rule of his brother. A treasury exhausted by the lavish and profitless waste of Edward; a land without castle or bulwark, even at the mouths of the rivers; a people grown inert by long peace, and so accustomed to own lord and king in the northern invaders, that a single successful battle might induce half the population to insist on the Saxon coming to terms with the foe, and yielding, as Ironsides did to Canute, one half of the realm. He enlarged on the terror of the Norsemen that still existed throughout England, and the affinity between the Northumbrians and East Anglians with the race of Hardrada. That affinity would not prevent them from resisting at the first; but grant success, and it would reconcile them to the after sway. And, finally, he aroused Hardrada's emulation by the spur of the news, that the

Count of the Normans would seize the prize if he himself delayed to forestall him.

These various representations, and the remembrance of Canute's victory, decided Hardrada; and, when Tostig ceased, he stretched his hand towards his slumbering war-ships, and exclaimed:

"Eno'; you have whetted the beaks of the ravens, and harnessed the steeds of the sea!"

CHAPTER VII

Meanwhile, King Harold of England had made himself dear to his people, and been true to the fame he had won as Harold the Earl. From the moment of his accession, "he showed himself pious, humble, and affable,[1] and omitted no occasions to show any token of bounteous liberality, gentleness, and courteous behaviour."—"The grievous customs, also, and taxes which his predecessors had raised, he either abolished or diminished; the ordinary wages of his servants and men-of-war he increased, and further showed himself very well bent to all virtue and goodness."[2]

Extracting the pith from these eulogies, it is clear that, as wise statesman no less than as good king, Harold sought to strengthen himself in the three great elements of regal power;—Conciliation of the Church, which had been opposed to his father; The popular affection, on which his sole claim to the crown reposed; And the military force of the land, which had been neglected in the reign of his peaceful predecessor.

[1] Hoveden.

[2] Holinshed. Nearly all chroniclers (even, with scarce an exception, those most favouring the Normans), concur in the abilities and merits of Harold as a king.

To the young Atheling he accorded a respect not before paid to him; and, while investing the descendant of the ancient line with princely state, and endowing him with large domains, his soul, too great for jealousy, sought to give more substantial power to his own most legitimate rival, by tender care and noble counsels,—by efforts to raise a character feeble by nature, and denationalised by foreign rearing. In the same broad and generous policy, Harold encouraged all the merchants from other countries who had settled in England, nor were even such Normans as had escaped the general sentence of banishment on Godwin's return, disturbed in their possessions. "In brief," saith the Anglo-Norman chronicler,[1] "no man was more prudent in the land, more valiant in arms, in the law more sagacious, in all probity more accomplished:" and "Ever active," says more mournfully the Saxon writer, "for the good of his country, he spared himself no fatigue by land or by sea."[2]

From this time, Harold's private life ceased. Love and its charms were no more. The glow of romance had vanished. He was not one man; he was the state, the representative, the incarnation of Saxon England: his sway and the Saxon freedom, to live or fall together!

The soul really grand is only tested in its errors. As we know the true might of the intellect by the rich resources and patient strength with which it redeems a failure, so do we prove the elevation of the soul by its courageous return into light, its instinctive rebound into higher air, after some error that has darkened its vision and soiled its plumes. A spirit less noble and pure than Harold's, once entering on the dismal world

[1] "Vit. Harold. Chron. Ang. Norm." ii. 243. [2] Hoveden.

of enchanted superstition, had habituated itself to that nether atmosphere; once misled from hardy truth and healthful reason, it had plunged deeper and deeper into the maze. But, unlike his contemporary, Macbeth, the Man escaped from the lures of the Fiend. Not as Hecate in hell, but as Dian in heaven, did he confront the pale Goddess of Night. Before that hour in which he had deserted the human judgment for the ghostly delusion; before that day in which the brave heart, in its sudden desertion, had humbled his pride—the man, in his nature, was more strong than the god. Now, purified by the flame that had scorched, and more nerved from the fall that had stunned,—that great soul rose sublime through the wrecks of the Past, serene through the clouds of the Future, concentring in its solitude the destinies of Mankind, and strong with instinctive Eternity amidst all the terrors of Time.

King Harold came from York, whither he had gone to cement the new power of Morcar, in Northumbria, and personally to confirm the allegiance of the Anglo-Danes:—King Harold came from York, and in the halls of Westminster he found a monk who awaited him with the messages of William the Norman.

Bare-footed, and serge-garbed, the Norman envoy strode to the Saxon's chair of state. His form was worn with mortification and fast, and his face was hueless and livid, with the perpetual struggle between zeal and flesh.

"Thus saith William, Count of the Normans," began Hugues Maigrot, the monk.

"With grief and amaze hath he heard that you, O Harold, his sworn liege-man, have, contrary to oath and to fealty, assumed the crown that belongs to himself. But, confiding in thy conscience, and forgiving

a moment's weakness, he summons thee, mildly and brother-like, to fulfil thy vow. Send thy sister, that he may give her in marriage to one of his Quens. Give him up the stronghold of Dover; march to thy coast with thine armies to aid him,—thy liege lord,—and secure him the heritage of Edward his cousin. And thou shalt reign at his right-hand, his daughter thy bride, Northumbria thy fief, and the saints thy protectors."

"The King's lip was firm, though pale, as he answered:

"My young sister, alas! is no more: seven nights after I ascended the throne, she died: her dust in the grave is all I could send to the arms of the bridegroom. I cannot wed the child of thy Count: the wife of Harold sits beside him." And he pointed to the proud beauty of Aldyth, enthroned under the drapery of gold. "For the vow that I took, I deny it not. But from a vow of compulsion, menaced with unworthy captivity, extorted from my lips by the very need of the land whose freedom had been bound in my chains—from a vow so compelled, Church and conscience absolve me. If the vow of a maiden on whom to bestow but her hand, when unknown to her parents, is judged invalid by the Church, how much more invalid the oath that would bestow on a stranger the fates of a nation,[1] against its knowledge, and unconsulting its laws! This royalty of England hath ever rested on the will of the people, declared through its chiefs in their solemn assembly. They alone who could bestow it, have bestowed it on me:—I have no power to resign it to another—and were I in my grave,

[1] Malmesbury.

the trust of the crown would not pass to the Norman, but return to the Saxon people."

"Is this, then, thy answer, unhappy son?" said the monk, with a sullen and gloomy aspect.

"Such is my answer."

"Then, sorrowing for thee, I utter the words of William. 'With sword and with mail will he come to punish the perjurer: and by the aid of St. Michael, archangel of war, he will conquer his own.' Amen."

"By sea and by land, with sword and with mail, will we meet the invader," answered the King, with a flashing eye. "Thou hast said:—so depart."

The monk turned and withdrew.

"Let the priest's insolence chafe thee not, sweet lord," said Aldyth. "For the vow which thou mightest take as subject, what matters it now thou art king?"

Harold made no answer to Aldyth, but turned to his Chamberlain, who stood behind his throne chair.

"Are my brothers without?"

"They are: and my lord the King's chosen council."

"Admit them: pardon, Aldyth; affairs fit only for men claim me now."

The Lady of England took the hint, and rose.

"But the even-mete will summon thee soon," said she.

Harold, who had already descended from his chair of-state, and was bending over a casket of papers on the table, replied:

"There is food *here* till the morrow; wait me not."

Aldyth sighed, and withdrew at the one door, while the thegns most in Harold's confidence entered at the other. But, once surrounded by her maidens, Aldyth

forgot all, save that she was again a queen,—forgot all, even to the earlier and less gorgeous diadem which her lord's hand had shattered on the brows of the son of Pendragon.

Leofwine, still gay and blithe-hearted, entered first: Gurth followed, then Haco, then some half-score of the greater thegns.

They seated themselves at the table, and Gurth spoke first:

"Tostig has been with Count William."

"I know it," said Harold.

"It is rumoured that he has passed to our uncle Sweyn."

"I foresaw it," said the King.

"And that Sweyn will aid him to reconquer England for the Dane."

"My bode reached Sweyn, with letters from Githa, before Tostig; my bode has returned this day. Sweyn has dismissed Tostig; Sweyn will send fifty ships, armed with picked men, to the aid of England."

"Brother," cried Leofwine, admiringly, "thou providest against danger ere we but surmise it."

"Tostig," continued the King, unheeding the compliment, "will be the first assailant: him we must meet. His fast friend is Malcolm of Scotland: him we must secure. Go thou, Leofwine, with these letters to Malcolm.—The next fear is from the Welch. Go thou, Edwin of Mercia, to the princes of Wales. On thy way, strengthen the forts and deepen the dykes of the marches. These tablets hold thy instructions. The Norman, as doubtless ye know, my thegns, hath sent to demand our crown, and hath announced the coming of his war. With the dawn I depart to

our port at Sandwich,[1] to muster our fleets. Thou with me, Gurth."

"These preparations need much treasure," said an old thegn, "and thou hast lessened the taxes at the hour of need."

"Not yet is it the hour of need. When it comes, our people will the more readily meet it with their gold as with their iron. There was great wealth in the House of Godwin; that wealth mans the ships of England. What hast thou there, Haco?"

"Thy new-issued coin: it hath on its reverse the word: 'PEACE.'"[2]

Who ever saw one of those coins of the Last Saxon King, the bold simple head on the one side, that single word "Peace" on the other, and did not feel awed and touched! What pathos in that word compared with the fate which it failed to propitiate!

"Peace," said Harold: "to all that doth not render peace, slavery. Yea, may I live to leave peace to our children! Now, peace only rests on our preparation for war. You, Morcar, will return with all speed to York, and look well to the mouth of the Humber."

Then, turning to each of the thegns successively he gave to each his post and his duty; and that done, converse grew more general. The many things needful that had been long rotting in neglect under the Monk-king, and now sprung up, craving instant reform, occupied them long and anxiously. But cheered and inspirited by the vigour and foresight of Harold, whose earlier slowness of character seemed winged by the occasion into rapid decision (as is not uncom-

[1] Supposed to be our first port for shipbuilding.—FOSBROOKE, p. 320.

[2] *Pax.*

mon with the Englishman), all difficulties seemed light, and hope and courage were in every breast.

CHAPTER VIII

Back went Hugues Maigrot, the monk, to William, and told the reply of Harold to the Duke, in the presence of Lanfranc. William himself heard it in gloomy silence, for Fitzosborne as yet had been wholly unsuccessful in stirring up the Norman barons to an expedition so hazardous, in a cause so doubtful; and though prepared for the defiance of Harold, the Duke was not prepared with the means to enforce his threats and make good his claim.

So great was his abstraction, that he suffered the Lombard to dismiss the monk without a word spoken by him; and he was first startled from his reverie by Lanfranc's pale hand on his vast shoulder, and Lanfranc's low voice in his dreamy ear:

"Up! Hero of Europe: for thy cause is won! Up! and write with thy bold characters, bold as if graved with the point of the sword, my credentials to Rome. Let me depart ere the sun sets: and as I go, look on the sinking orb, and behold the sun of the Saxon that sets evermore on England!"

Then briefly, that ablest statesman of the age, (and forgive him, despite our modern lights, we must; for, sincere son of the Church, he regarded the violated oath of Harold as entailing the legitimate forfeiture of his realm, and, ignorant of true political freedom, looked upon Church and Learning as the only civilisers of men,) then, briefly, Lanfranc detailed to the listening Norman the outline of the arguments by

which he intended to move the Pontifical court to the Norman side; and enlarged upon the vast accession throughout all Europe which the solemn sanction of the Church would bring to his strength. William's re-awaking and ready intellect soon seized upon the importance of the object pressed upon him. He interrupted the Lombard, drew pen and parchment towards him, and wrote rapidly. Horses were harnessed, horsemen equipped in haste, and with no unfitting retinue Lanfranc departed on the mission, the most important in its consequences that ever passed from potentate to pontiff.[1] Rebraced to its purpose by Lanfranc's cheering assurances, the resolute, indomitable soul of William now applied itself, night and day, to the difficult task of rousing his haughty vavasours. Yet weeks passed before he could even meet a select council composed of his own kinsmen and most trusted lords. These, however, privately won over, promised to serve him "with body and goods." But one and all they told him, he must gain the consent of the whole principality in a general council. That council was convened: thither came not only lords and knights, but merchants and traders,—all the rising middle class of a thriving state.

The Duke bared his wrongs, his claims, and his schemes. The assembly would not or did not discuss the matter in his presence, they would not be awed by its influence; and William retired from the hall. Various were the opinions, stormy the debate; and so

[1] Some of the Norman chroniclers state that Robert, Archbishop of Canterbury, who had been expelled from England at Godwin's return, was Lanfranc's companion in this mission; but more trustworthy authorities assure us that Robert had been dead some years before, not long surviving his return into Normandy.

great the disorder grew, that Fitzosborne, rising in the midst, exclaimed:

"Why this dispute?—why this unduteous discord? Is not William your lord? Hath he not need of you? Fail him now—and, you know him well—by G— he will remember it! Aid him—and you know him well—large are his rewards to service and love!"

Up rose at once baron and merchant; and when at last their spokesman was chosen, that spokesman said:

"William is our lord; is it not enough to pay to our lord his dues? No aid do we owe beyond the seas! Sore harassed and taxed are we already by his wars! Let him fail in this strange and unparalleled hazard, and our land is undone!"

Loud applause followed this speech; the majority of the council were against the Duke.

"Then," said Fitzosborne, craftily, "I, who know the means of each man present, will, with your leave, represent your necessities to your Count, and make such modest offer of assistance as may please ye, yet not chafe your liege."

Into the trap of this proposal the opponents fell; and Fitzosborne, at the head of the body, returned to William.

The Lord of Breteuil approached the daïs, on which William sate alone, his great sword in his hand, and thus spoke:

"My liege, I may well say that never prince has people more leal than yours, nor that have more proved their faith and love by the burdens they have borne and the monies they have granted."

An universal murmur of applause followed these words. "Good! good!" almost shouted the merchants especially. William's brows met, and he looked

very terrible. The Lord of Breteuil gracefully waved his hand, and resumed:

"Yea, my liege, much have they borne for your glory and need; much more will they bear."

The faces of the audience fell.

"Their service does not compel them to aid you beyond the seas."

The faces of the audience brightened.

"But now they *will* aid you, in the land of the Saxon as in that of the Frank."

"How?" cried a stray voice or two.

"Hush, O *gentilz amys*. Forward, then, O my liege, and spare them in nought. He who has hitherto supplied you with two good mounted soldiers, will now grant you four; and he who—"

"No, no, no!" roared two-thirds of the assembly; "we charged you with no such answer; we said not that, nor that shall it be!"

Out stepped a baron.

"Within this country, to defend it, we will serve our Count; but to aid him to conquer another man's country, no!"

Out stepped a knight.

"If once we rendered this double service, beyond seas as at home, it would be held a right and a custom hereafter; and we should be as mercenary soldiers, not free-born Normans."

Out stepped a merchant.

"And we and our children would be burdened for ever to feed one man's ambition, whenever he saw a king to dethrone, or a realm to seize."

And then cried a general chorus:

"It shall not be—it shall not!"

The assembly broke at once into knots of tens,

twenties, thirties, gesticulating and speaking aloud, like freemen in anger. And ere William, with all his prompt dissimulation, could do more than smother his rage, and sit gripping his sword hilt, and setting his teeth, the assembly dispersed.

Such were the free souls of the Normans under the greatest of their chiefs; and had those souls been less free, England had not been enslaved in one age, to become free again, God grant, to the end of time!

CHAPTER IX

Through the blue skies over England there rushed the bright stranger—a meteor, a comet, a fiery star! "such as no man before ever saw;" it appeared on the 8th, before the kalends of May; seven nights did it shine,[1] and the faces of sleepless men were pale under the angry glare.

The river of Thames rushed blood-red in the beam, the winds at play on the broad waves of the Humber, broke the surge of the billows into sparkles of fire. With three streamers, sharp and long as the sting of a dragon, the foreboder of wrath rushed through the hosts of the stars. On every ruinous fort, by sea-coast and march, the warder crossed his breast to behold it; on hill and in thoroughfare, crowds nightly assembled to gaze on the terrible star. Muttering hymns, monks huddled together round the altars, as if to exorcise the land of a demon. The gravestone of the Saxon father-chief was lit up, as with the coil of the lightning; and the Morthwyrtha looked from the mound, and saw in her visions of awe the Valkyrs in the train of the fiery star.

[1] Saxon Chronicle.

On the roof of his palace stood Harold the King, and with folded arms he looked on the Rider of Night. And up the stairs of the turret came the soft steps of Haco, and stealing near to the King, he said:

"Arm in haste, for the bodes have come breathless to tell thee that Tostig, thy brother, with pirate and war-ship, is wasting thy shores and slaughtering thy people!"

CHAPTER X

Tostig, with the ships he had gained both from Norman and Norwegian, recruited by Flemish adventurers, fled fast from the banners of Harold. After plundering the Isle of Wight, and the Hampshire coasts, he sailed up the Humber, where his vain heart had counted on friends yet left him in his ancient earldom; but Harold's soul of vigour was everywhere. Morcar, prepared by the King's bodes, encountered and chased the traitor, and, deserted by most of his ships, with but twelve small craft Tostig gained the shores of Scotland. There, again forestalled by the Saxon King, he failed in succour from Malcolm, and retreating to the Orkneys, waited the fleets of Hardrada.

And now Harold, thus at freedom for defence against a foe more formidable and less unnatural, hastened to make secure both the sea and the coast against William the Norman. "So great a ship force, so great a land force, no king in the land had before." All the summer, his fleets swept the channel; his forces "lay everywhere by the sea."

But alas! now came the time when the improvident waste of Edward began to be felt. Provisions and

pay for the armaments failed.[1] On the defective resources at Harold's disposal, no modern historian hath sufficiently dwelt. The last Saxon king, the chosen of the people, had not those levies, and could impose not those burdens which made his successors mighty in war; and men began now to think that, after all, there was no fear of this Norman invasion. The summer was gone; the autumn was come; was it likely that William would dare to trust himself in an enemy's country as the winter drew near? The Saxons—unlike their fiercer kindred of Scandinavia, had no pleasure in war;—they fought well in front of a foe, but they loathed the tedious preparations and costly sacrifices which prudence demanded for self-defence. They now revolted from a strain upon their energies, of the necessity of which they were not convinced! Joyous at the temporary defeat of Tostig, men said, "Marry, a joke indeed, that the Norman will put his shaven head into the hornets' nest! Let him come, if he dare!"

Still, with desperate effort, and at much risk of popularity, Harold held together a force sufficient to repel any *single* invader. From the time of his accession his sleepless vigilance had kept watch on the Norman, and his spies brought him news of all that passed.

And now what had passed in the councils of William? The abrupt disappointment which the Grand Assembly had occasioned him did not last very long. Made aware that he could not trust to the spirit of an assembly, William now artfully summoned mer-

[1] *Saxon Chronicle.*—"When it was the nativity of St. Mary, then were the men's provisions gone, and no man could any longer keep them there."

chant, and knight, and baron, one by one. Submitted to the eloquence, the promises, the craft, of that master intellect, and to the awe of that imposing presence; unassisted by the courage which inferiors take from numbers, one by one yielded to the will of the Count, and subscribed his quota for monies, for ships, and for men. And while this went on, Lanfranc was at work in the Vatican. At that time the Archdeacon of the Roman Church was the famous Hildebrand. This extraordinary man, fit fellow-spirit to Lanfranc, nursed one darling project, the success of which indeed founded the true temporal power of the Roman pontiffs. It was no less than that of converting the mere religious ascendancy of the Holy See into the actual sovereignty over the states of Christendom. The most immediate agents of this gigantic scheme were the Normans, who had conquered Naples by the arm of the adventurer Robert Guiscard, and under the gonfanon of St. Peter. Most of the new Norman countships and dukedoms thus created in Italy had declared themselves fiefs of the Church; and the successor of the Apostle might well hope, by aid of the Norman priest-knights, to extend his sovereignty over Italy, and then dictate to the kings beyond the Alps.

The aid of Hildebrand in behalf of William's claims was obtained at once by Lanfranc. The profound Archdeacon of Rome saw at a glance the immense power that would accrue to the Church by the mere act of arrogating to itself the disposition of crowns, subjecting rival princes to abide by its decision, and fixing the men of its choice on the thrones of the North. Despite all its slavish superstition, the Saxon Church was obnoxious to Rome. Even the pious

Edward had offended, by withholding the old levy of Peter Pence; and simony, a crime peculiarly reprobated by the pontiff, was notorious in England. Therefore there was much to aid Hildebrand in the Assembly of the Cardinals, when he brought before them the oath of Harold, the violation of the sacred relics, and demanded that the pious Normans, true friends to the Roman Church, should be permitted to Christianise the barbarous Saxons,[1] and William be nominated as heir to a throne promised to him by Edward, and forfeited by the perjury of Harold. Nevertheless, to the honour of that assembly, and of man, there was a holy opposition to this wholesale barter of human rights—this sanction of an armed onslaught on a Christian people. "It is infamous," said the good, "to authorise homicide." But Hildebrand was all-powerful, and prevailed.

William was at high feast with his barons when Lanfranc dismounted at his gates and entered his hall.

"Hail to thee, King of England!" he said. "I bring the bull that excommunicates Harold and his adherents; I bring to thee the gift of the Roman Church, the land and royalty of England. I bring to thee the gonfanon hallowed by the heir of the Apostle, and the very ring that contains the precious relic of the Apostle himself! Now who will shrink from thy side? Publish thy ban, not in Normandy alone, but

[1] It is curious to notice how England was represented as a country almost heathen; its conquest was regarded quite as a pious, benevolent act of charity—a sort of mission for converting the savages. And all this while England was under the most slavish ecclesiastical domination, and the priesthood possessed a third of its land! But the heart of England never forgave that league of the Pope with the Conqueror; and the seeds of the Reformed Religion were trampled deep into the Saxon soil by the feet of the invading Norman.

in every region and realm where the Church is honoured. This is the first war of the Cross."

Then indeed was it seen—that might of the Church! Soon as were made known the sanction and gifts of the Pope, all the continent stirred as to the blast of the trump in the Crusade, of which that war was the herald. From Maine and from Anjou, from Poitou and Bretagne, from France and from Flanders, from Aquitaine and Burgundy, flashed the spear, galloped the steed. The robber-chiefs from the castles now grey on the Rhine; the hunters and bandits from the roots of the Alps; baron and knight, varlet and vagrant,—all came to the flag of the Church,—to the pillage of England. For side by side with the Pope's holy bull was the martial ban:—"Good pay and broad lands to every one who will serve Count William with spear, and with sword, and with cross-bow." And the Duke said to Fitzosborne, as he parcelled out the fair fields of England into Norman fiefs:

"Harold hath not the strength of mind to promise the least of those things that belong to me. But I have the right to promise that which is mine, and also that which belongs to him. He must be the victor who can give away both his own and what belongs to his foe." [1]

All on the continent of Europe regarded England's king as accursed—William's enterprise as holy; and mothers who had turned pale when their sons went forth to the boar-chase, sent their darlings to enter their names, for the weal of their souls, in the swollen muster-roll of William the Norman. Every port now

[1] William of Poitiers.—The *naïve* sagacity of this bandit argument, and the Norman's contempt for Harold's deficiency in "strength of mind," are exquisite illustrations of character.

in Neustria was busy with terrible life; in every wood was heard the axe felling logs for the ships; from every anvil flew the sparks from the hammer, as iron took shape into helmet and sword. All things seemed to favour the Church's chosen one. Conan, Count of Bretagne, sent to claim the Duchy of Normandy, as legitimate heir. A few days afterwards, Conan died, poisoned (as had died his father before him) by the mouth of his horn and the web of his gloves. And the new Count of Bretagne sent his sons to take part against Harold.

All the armament mustered at the roadstead of St. Valery, at the mouth of the Somme. But the winds were long hostile, and the rains fell in torrents.

CHAPTER XI

And now, while war thus hungered for England at the mouth of the Somme, the last and most renowned of the sea-kings, Harold Hardrada, entered his galley, the tallest and strongest of a fleet of three hundred sail, that peopled the seas round Solundir. And a man named Gyrdir, on board the King's ship, dreamed a dream.[1] He saw a great witch-wife standing on an isle of the Sulen, with a fork in one hand and a trough in the other.[2] He saw her pass over the whole fleet; —by each of the three hundred ships he saw her; and

[1] Snorro Sturleson.

[2] Does any Scandinavian scholar know why the trough was so associated with the images of Scandinavian witchcraft? A witch was known, when seen behind, by a kind of trough-like shape; there must be some symbol, of very ancient mythology, in this superstition!

a fowl sat on the stern of each ship, and that fowl was a raven; and he heard the witch-wife sing this song:

"From the East I allure him,
At the West I secure him;
In the feast I foresee
Rare the relics for me;
Red the drink, white the bones.

"The ravens sit greeding,
And watching, and heeding;
Thoro' wind, over water,
Comes scent of the slaughter,
And ravens sit greeding
Their share of the bones.

"Thoro' wind, thoro' weather,
We're sailing together;
I sail with the ravens;
I watch with the ravens;
I snatch from the ravens
My share of the bones."

There was also a man called Thord,[1] in a ship that lay near the King's; and he too dreamed a dream. He saw the fleet nearing land, and that land was England. And on the land was a battle-array two-fold, and many banners were flapping on both sides. And before the army of the land-folk was riding a huge witch-wife upon a wolf; the wolf had a man's carcase in his mouth, and the blood was dripping and dropping from his jaws; and when the wolf had eaten up that carcase, the witch-wife threw another into his jaws; and so, one after another; and the wolf cranched and swallowed them all. And the witch-wife sang this song:

"The green waving fields
Are hidden behind

[1] Snorro Sturleson.

The flash of the shields,
And the rush of the banners
That toss in the wind.

"But Skade's eagle eyes
Pierce the wall of the steel,
And behold from the skies
What the earth would conceal;
O'er the rush of the banners
She poises her wing,
And marks with a shadow
The brow of the King.

"And, in bode of his doom,
Jaw of Wolf, be the tomb
Of the bones and the flesh,
Gore-bedabbled and fresh,
That cranch and that drip
Under fang and from lip.
As I ride in the van
Of the feasters on man,
With the King!

"Grim wolf, sate thy maw,
Full enow shall there be.
Hairy jaw, hungry maw,
Both for ye and for me!

"Meaner food be the feast
Of the fowl and the beast;
But the witch, for her share,
Takes the best of the fare:
And the witch shall be fed
With the king of the dead,
When she rides in the van
Of the slayers of man,
With the King."

And King Harold dreamed a dream. And he saw before him his brother, St. Olave. And the dead, to the Scald-King sang this song:

"Bold as thou in the fight,
Blithe as thou in the hall,
Shone the noon of my might,
Ere the night of my fall!

"How humble is death,
And how haughty is life;
And how fleeting the breath
Between slumber and strife!

"All the earth is too narrow,
O life, for thy tread!
Two strides o'er the barrow
Can measure the dead.

"Yet mighty that space is
Which seemeth so small;
The realm of all races,
With room for them all!"

But Harold Hardrada scorned witch-wife and dream; and his fleets sailed on. Tostig joined him off the Orkney Isles, and this great armament soon came in sight of the shores of England. They landed at Cleveland,[1] and at the dread of the terrible Norsemen, the coast men fled or submitted. With booty and plunder they sailed on to Scarborough, but there the townsfolk were brave, and the walls were strong. The Norsemen ascended a hill above the town, lit a huge pile of wood, and tossed the burning piles down on the roofs. House after house caught the flame, and through the glare and the crash rushed the men of Hardrada. Great was the slaughter, and ample the plunder; and the town, awed and depeopled, submitted to flame and to sword.

Then the fleet sailed up the Humber and Ouse, and landed at Richall, not far from York; but Morcar, the

[1] Snorro Sturleson.

Earl of Northumbria, came out with all his forces,—all the stout men and tall of the great race of the Anglo-Dane.

Then Hardrada advanced his flag, called Land-Eyda, the "Ravager of the World," [1] and, chaunting a war-stave,—led his men to the onslaught.

The battle was fierce, but short. The English troops were defeated, they fled into York; and the Ravager of the World was borne in triumph to the gates of the town. An exiled chief, however tyrannous and hateful, hath ever some friends among the desperate and lawless; and success ever finds allies among the weak and the craven,—so many Northumbrians now came to the side of Tostig. Dissension and mutiny broke out amidst the garrison within; Morcar, unable to control the townsfolk, was driven forth with those still true to their country and King, and York agreed to open its gates to the conquering invader.

At the news of this foe on the north side of the land, King Harold was compelled to withdraw all the forces at watch in the south against the tardy invasion of William. It was the middle of September; eight months had elapsed since the Norman had launched forth his vaunting threat. Would he now dare to come?—Come or not, *that* foe was afar, and *this* was in the heart of the country!

Now, York having thus capitulated, all the land round was humbled and awed; and Hardrada and Tostig were blithe and gay; and many days, thought

[1] So Thierry translates the word: others, the Land-ravager. In Danish, the word is Land-ode, in Icelandic, Land-eydo.—Note to Thierry's "Hist. of the Conq. of England," book iii. vol. vi. p. 169 (of Hazlitt's translation).

they, must pass ere Harold the King can come from the south to the north.

The camp of the Norsemen was at Stanford Bridge, and that day it was settled that they should formally enter York. Their ships lay in the river beyond; a large portion of the armament was with the ships. The day was warm, and the men with Hardrada had laid aside their heavy mail and were "making merry," talking of the plunder of York, jeering at Saxon valour, and gloating over thoughts of the Saxon maids, whom Saxon men had failed to protect,—when suddenly between them and the town rose and rolled a great cloud of dust. High it rose, and fast it rolled, and from the heart of the cloud shone the spear and the shield.

"What army comes yonder?" said Harold Hardrada.

"Surely," answered Tostig, "it comes from the town that we are to enter as conquerors, and can be but the friendly Northumbrians who have deserted Morcar for me."

Nearer and nearer came the force, and the shine of the arms was like the glancing of ice.

"Advance the World-Ravager!" cried Harold Hardrada, "draw up, and to arms!"

Then, picking out three of his briskest youths, he despatched them to the force on the river with orders to come up quick to the aid. For already, through the cloud and amidst the spears, was seen the flag of the English King. On the previous night King Harold had entered York, unknown to the invaders—appeased the mutiny—cheered the townsfolks; and now came like a thunderbolt borne by the winds, to clear the air of England from the clouds of the North.

Both armaments drew up in haste, and Hardrada formed his array in the form of a circle,—the line long but not deep, the wings curving round till they met,[1] shield to shield. Those who stood in the first rank set their spear shafts on the ground, the points level with the breast of a horseman; those in the second, with spears yet lower, level with the breast of a horse; thus forming a double palisade against the charge of cavalry. In the centre of this circle was placed the Ravager of the World, and round it a rampart of shields. Behind that rampart was the accustomed post at the onset of battle for the King and his body-guard. But Tostig was in front, with his own Northumbrian lion banner, and his chosen men.

While this army was thus being formed, the English King was marshalling his force in the far more formidable tactics, which his military science had perfected from the warfare of the Danes. That form of battalion, invincible hitherto under his leadership, was in the manner of a wedge or triangle thus △. So that, in attack, the men marched on the foe presenting the smallest possible surface to the missives, and in defence, all three lines faced the assailants. King Harold cast his eye over the closing lines, and then, turning to Gurth, who rode by his side, said:

"Take one man from yon hostile army, and with what joy should we charge on the Northmen!"

"I conceive thee," answered Gurth, mournfully, "and the same thought of that one man makes my arm feel palsied."

The King mused, and drew down the nasal bar of his helmet.

"Thegns," said he suddenly, to the score of riders

[1] Snorro Sturleson.

who grouped round him, "follow." And shaking the rein of his horse, King Harold rode straight to that part of the hostile front from which rose, above the spears, the Northumbrian banner of Tostig. Wondering, but mute, the twenty thegns followed him. Before the grim array, and hard by Tostig's banner, the King checked his steed and cried:

"Is Tostig, the son of Godwin and Githa, by the flag of the Northumbrian earldom?"

With his helmet raised, and his Norwegian mantle flowing over his mail, Earl Tostig rode forth at that voice, and came up to the speaker.[1]

"What wouldst thou with me, daring foe?"

The Saxon horseman paused, and his deep voice trembled tenderly, as he answered slowly:

"Thy brother, King Harold, sends to salute thee. Let not the sons from the same womb wage unnatural war in the soil of their fathers."

"What will Harold the King give to his brother?" answered Tostig, "Northumbria already he hath bestowed on the son of his house's foe."

The Saxon hesitated, and a rider by his side took up the word.

"If the Northumbrians will receive thee again, Northumbria shalt thou have, and the King will bestow his late earldom of Wessex on Morcar; if the Northumbrians reject thee, thou shalt have all the lordships which King Harold hath promised to Gurth."

"This is well," answered Tostig; and he seemed to pause as in doubt;—when, made aware of this parley, King Harold Hardrada, on his coal-black steed, with

[1] See Snorro Sturleson for this parley between Harold in *person* and Tostig. The account differs from the Saxon chroniclers, but in this particular instance is likely to be as accurate.

his helm all shining with gold, rode from the lines, and came into hearing.

"Ha!" said Tostig, then turning round, as the giant form of the Norse King threw its vast shadow over the ground.

"And if I take the offer, what will Harold son of Godwin give to my friend and ally Hardrada of Norway?"

The Saxon rider reared his head at these words, and gazed on the large front of Hardrada, as he answered, loud and distinct:

"Seven feet of land for a grave, or, seeing that he is taller than other men, as much more as his corse may demand!"

"Then go back, and tell Harold my brother to get ready for battle; for never shall the Scalds and the warriors of Norway say that Tostig lured their king in his cause, to betray him to his foe. Here did he come, and here came I, to win as the brave win, or die as the brave die!"

A rider of younger and slighter form than the rest, here whispered the Saxon King:

"Delay no more, or thy men's hearts will fear treason."

"The tie is rent from my heart, O Haco," answered the King, "and the heart flies back to our England."

He waved his hand, turned his steed, and rode off. The eye of Hardrada followed the horseman.

"And who," he asked calmly, "is that man who spoke so well?"[1]

"King Harold!" answered Tostig, briefly.

"How!" cried the Norseman, reddening, "how was not that made known to me before? Never should

[1] Snorro Sturleson.

he have gone back,—never told hereafter the doom of this day!"

With all his ferocity, his envy, his grudge to Harold, and his treason to England, some rude notions of honour still lay confused in the breast of the Saxon; and he answered stoutly:

"Imprudent was Harold's coming, and great his danger; but he came to offer me peace and dominion. Had I betrayed him, I had not been his foe, but his murderer!"

The Norse King smiled approvingly, and, turning to his chiefs, said drily:

"That man was shorter than some of us, but he rode firm in his stirrups."

And then this extraordinary person, who united in himself all the types of an age that vanished for ever in his grave, and who is the more interesting, as in him we see the race from which the Norman sprang, began, in the rich full voice that pealed deep as an organ, to chaunt his impromptu war-song. He halted in the midst, and with great composure said:

"That verse is but ill-tuned: I must try a better."[1]

He passed his hand over his brow, mused an instant, and then, with his fair face all illumined, he burst forth as inspired.

This time, air, rhythm, words, all so chimed in with his own enthusiasm and that of his men, that the effect was inexpressible. It was, indeed, like the charm of those runes which are said to have maddened the Berserker with the frenzy of war.

Meanwhile the Saxon phalanx came on, slow and firm, and in a few minutes the battle began. It commenced first with the charge of the English cavalry

[1] Snorro Sturleson.

(never numerous), led by Leofwine and Haco, but the double palisade of the Norman spears formed an impassable barrier; and the horsemen, recoiling from the frieze, rode round the iron circle without other damage than the spear and javelin could effect. Meanwhile, King Harold, who had dismounted, marched, as was his wont, with the body of footmen. He kept his post in the hollow of the triangular wedge; whence he could best issue his orders. Avoiding the side over which Tostig presided, he halted his array in full centre of the enemy, where the Ravager of the World, streaming high above the inner rampart of shields, showed the presence of the giant Hardrada.

The air was now literally darkened with the flights of arrows and spears; and in a war of missives, the Saxons were less skilled than the Norsemen. Still King Harold restrained the ardour of his men, who, sore harassed by the darts, yearned to close on the foe. He himself, standing on a little eminence, more exposed than his meanest soldier, deliberately eyed the sallies of the horse, and watched the moment he foresaw, when, encouraged by his own suspense and the feeble attacks of the cavalry, the Norsemen would lift their spears from the ground, and advance themselves to the assault. That moment came; unable to withhold their own fiery zeal, stimulated by the tromp and the clash, and the war hymns of their King, and his choral Scalds, the Norsemen broke ground and came on.

"To your axes, and charge!" cried Harold; and passing at once from the centre to the front, he led on the array.

The impetus of that artful phalanx was tremendous; it pierced through the ring of the Norwegians; it

clove into the rampart of shields; and King Harold's battle-axe was the first that shivered that wall of steel; his step the first that strode into the innermost circle that guarded the Ravager of the World.

Then forth, from under the shade of that great flag, came, himself also on foot, Harold Hardrada; shouting and chaunting, he leapt with long strides into the thick of the onslaught. He had flung away his shield, and swaying with both hands his enormous sword, he hewed down man after man till space grew clear before him; and the English, recoiling in awe before an image of height and strength that seemed superhuman, left but one form standing firm, and in front, to oppose his way.

At that moment the whole strife seemed not to belong to an age comparatively modern, it took a character of remotest eld; and Thor and Odin seemed to have returned to the earth. Behind this towering and Titan warrior, their wild hair streaming long under their helms, came his Scalds, all singing their hymns, drunk with the madness of battle. And the Ravager of the World tossed and flapped as it followed, so that the vast raven depicted on its folds seemed horrid with life. And calm and alone, his eye watchful, his axe lifted, his foot ready for rush or for spring—but firm as an oak against flight—stood the Last of the Saxon Kings.

Down bounded Hardrada, and down shore his sword; King Harold's shield was cloven in two, and the force of the blow brought himself to his knee. But, as swift as the flash of that sword, he sprang to his feet; and while Hardrada still bowed his head, not recovered from the force of his blow, the axe of the Saxon came so full on his helmet, that the giant reeled,

dropped his sword, and staggered back; his Scalds and his chiefs rushed around him. That gallant stand of King Harold saved his English from flight; and now, as they saw him almost lost in the throng, yet still cleaving his way—on, on—to the raven standard, they rallied with one heart, and shouting forth, "Out, out! Holy Crosse!" forced their way to his side, and the fight now waged hot and equal, hand to hand. Meanwhile Hardrada, borne a little apart, and relieved from his dinted helmet, recovered the shock of the weightiest blow that had ever dimmed his eye and numbed his hand. Tossing the helmet on the ground, his bright locks glittering like sunbeams, he rushed back to the *mêlée*. Again helm and mail went down before him; again through the crowd he saw the arm that had smitten him; again he sprang forwards to finish the war with a blow,—when a shaft from some distant bow pierced the throat which the casque now left bare; a sound like the wail of a death-song murmured brokenly from his lips, which then gushed out with blood, and tossing up his arms wildly, he fell to the ground, a corpse. At that sight, a yell of such terror, and woe, and wrath all commingled, broke from the Norsemen, that it hushed the very war for the moment!

"On!" cried the Saxon King; "let our earth take its spoiler! On to the standard, and the day is our own!"

"On to the standard!" cried Haco, who, his horse slain under him, all bloody with wounds not his own, now came to the King's side. Grim and tall rose the standard, and the streamer shrieked and flapped in the wind as if the raven had voice, when, right before Harold, right between him and the banner, stood

Tostig his brother, known by the splendour of his mail, the gold work on his mantle—known by the fierce laugh, and the defying voice.

"What matters!" cried Haco; "strike, O King, for thy crown!"

Harold's hand griped Haco's arm convulsively; he lowered his axe, turned round, and passed shudderingly away.

Both armies now paused from the attack; for both were thrown into great disorder, and each gladly gave respite to the other, to re-form its own shattered array.

The Norsemen were not the soldiers to yield because their leader was slain—rather the more resolute to fight, since revenge was now added to valour; yet, but for the daring and promptness with which Tostig had cut his way to the standard, the day had been already decided.

During the pause, Harold summoning Gurth, said to him in great emotion, "For the sake of Nature, for the love of God, go, O Gurth,—go to Tostig; urge him, now Hardrada is dead, urge him to peace. All that we can proffer with honour, proffer—quarter and free retreat to every Norseman.[1] Oh, save me, save us, from a brother's blood!"

Gurth lifted his helmet, and kissed the mailed hand that grasped his own.

"I go," said he. And so, bareheaded, and with a single trumpeter, he went to the hostile lines.

Harold awaited him in great agitation; nor could any man have guessed what bitter and awful thoughts lay in that heart, from which, in the way to power, tie after tie had been wrenched away. He did not

[1] Sharon Turner's Anglo-Saxons, vol. ii. p. 396. Snorro Sturleson.

wait long; and even before Gurth rejoined him, he knew by an unanimous shout of fury, to which the clash of countless shields chimed in, that the mission had been in vain.

Tostig had refused to hear Gurth, save in presence of the Norwegian chiefs; and when the message had been delivered, they all cried, "We would rather fall one across the corpse of the other,[1] than leave a field in which our King was slain."

"Ye hear them," said Tostig; "as they speak, speak I."

"Not mine this guilt, *too*, O God!" said Harold, solemnly lifting his hand on high. "Now, then, to duty."

By this time the Norwegian reinforcements had arrived from the ships, and this for a short time rendered the conflict, that immediately ensued, uncertain and critical. But Harold's generalship was now as consummate as his valour had been daring. He kept his men true to their irrefragable line. Even if fragments splintered off, each fragment threw itself into the form of the resistless wedge. One Norwegian, standing on the bridge of Stanford, long guarded that pass; and no less than forty Saxons are said to have perished by his arm. To him the English King sent a generous pledge, not only of safety for the life, but honour for the valour. The viking refused to surrender, and fell at last by a javelin from the hand of Haco. As if in him had been embodied the unyielding war-god of the Norsemen, in that death died the last hope of the vikings. They fell literally where they stood; many, from sheer exhaustion and the

[1] Snorro Sturleson.

weight of their mail, died without a blow.[1] And in the shades of nightfall, Harold stood amidst the shattered rampart of shields, his foot on the corpse of the standard-bearer, his hand on the Ravager of the World.

"Thy brother's corpse is borne yonder," said Haco in the ear of the King, as wiping the blood from his sword, he plunged it back into the sheath.

CHAPTER XII

Young Olave, the son of Hardrada, had happily escaped the slaughter. A strong detachment of the Norwegians had still remained with the vessels, and amongst them some prudent old chiefs, who foreseeing the probable results of the day, and knowing that Hardrada would never quit, save as a conqueror or a corpse, the field on which he had planted the Ravager of the World, had detained the prince almost by force from sharing the fate of his father. But ere those vessels could put out to sea, the vigorous measures of the Saxon King had already intercepted the retreat of the vessels. And then, ranging their shields as a wall round their masts, the bold vikings at least determined to die as men. But with the morning came King Harold himself to the banks of the river, and behind him, with trailed lances, a solemn procession that bore the body of the Scald King. They halted on the margin, and a boat was launched towards the Norwegian fleet, bearing a monk, who demanded the chiefs to send a deputation, headed by

[1] The quick succession of events allowed the Saxon army no time to bury the slain; and the bones of the invaders whitened the field of battle for many years afterwards.

the young Prince himself, to receive the corpse of their King, and hear the proposals of the Saxon.

The vikings, who had anticipated no preliminaries to the massacre they awaited, did not hesitate to accept these overtures. Twelve of the most famous chiefs still surviving, and Olave himself, entered the boat; and, standing between his brothers, Leofwine and Gurth, Harold thus accosted them:

"Your King invaded a people that had given him no offence; he has paid the forfeit—we war not with the dead! Give to his remains the honours due to the brave. Without ransom or condition, we yield to you what can no longer harm us. And for thee, young Prince," continued the King, with a tone of pity in his voice, as he contemplated the stately boyhood, and proud, but deep grief in the face of Olave; "for thee, wilt thou not live to learn that the wars of Odin are treason to the Faith of the Cross? We have conquered—we dare not butcher. Take such ships as ye need for those that survive. Three-and-twenty I offer for your transport. Return to your native shores, and guard them as we have guarded ours. Are ye contented?"

Amongst those chiefs was a stern priest—the Bishop of the Orcades—he advanced and bent his knee to the King.

"O Lord of England," said he, "yesterday thou didst conquer the form—to-day, the soul. And never more may generous Norsemen invade the coast of him who honours the dead and spares the living."

"Amen!" cried the chiefs, and they all knelt to Harold. The young Prince stood a moment irresolute, for his dead father was on the bier before him, and revenge was yet a virtue in the heart of a sea-king.

But lifting his eyes to Harold's, the mild and gentle majesty of the Saxon's brow was irresistible in its benign command; and stretching his right hand to the King, he raised on high the other, and said aloud, "Faith and friendship with thee and England evermore."

Then all the chiefs rising, they gathered round the bier, but no hand, in the sight of the conquering foe, lifted the cloth of gold that covered the corpse of the famous King. The bearers of the bier moved on slowly towards the boat; the Norwegians followed with measured funereal steps. And not till the bier was placed on board the royal galley was there heard the wail of woe; but then it came, loud, and deep, and dismal, and was followed by a burst of wild song from a surviving Scald.

The Norwegian preparations for departure were soon made, and the ships vouchsafed to their convoy raised anchor, and sailed down the stream. Harold's eye watched the ships from the river banks.

"And there," said he, at last, "there glide the last sails that shall ever bear the devastating raven to the shores of England."

Truly, in that field had been the most signal defeat those warriors, hitherto almost invincible, had known. On that bier lay the last son of Berserker and sea-king: and be it, O Harold, remembered in thine honour, that not by the Norman, but by thee, true-hearted Saxon, was trampled on the English soil the Ravager of the World![1]

"So be it," said Haco, "and so, methinks, will it

[1] It may be said indeed, that, in the following reign, the Danes under Osbiorn (brother of King Sweyn), sailed up the Humber; but it was to *assist* the English, not to invade them. They were *bought off* by the Normans,—not conquered.

be. But forget not the descendant of the Norsemen, the Count of Rouen!"

Harold started, and turned to his chiefs. "Sound trumpet, and fall in. To York we march. There resettle the earldom, collect the spoil, and then back, my men, to the southern shores. Yet first kneel thou, Haco, son of my brother Sweyn: thy deeds were done in the light of Heaven, in the sight of warriors in the open field; so should thine honours find thee! Not with the vain fripperies of Norman knighthood do I deck thee, but make thee one of the elder brotherhood of Ministers and Miles. I gird round thy loins mine own baldric of pure silver; I place in thy hand mine own sword of plain steel; and bid thee rise to take place in council and camps amongst the Proceres of England,—Earl of Hertford and Essex. Boy," whispered the King, as he bent over the pale cheek of his nephew, "thank not me. From me the thanks should come. On the day that saw Tostig's crime and his death, thou didst purify the name of my brother Sweyn! On to our city of York!"

High banquet was held in York; and, according to the customs of the Saxon monarchs, the King could not absent himself from the Victory Feast of his thegns. He sate at the head of the board, between his brothers. Morcar, whose departure from the city had deprived him of a share in the battle, had arrived that day with his brother Edwin, whom he had gone to summon to his aid. And though the young Earls envied the fame they had not shared, the envy was noble.

Gay and boisterous was the wassail; and lively song, long neglected in England, woke, as it wakes ever, at the breath of Joy and Fame. As if in the days of Al-

fred, the harp passed from hand to hand; martial and rough the strain beneath the touch of the Anglo-Dane, more refined and thoughtful the lay when it chimed to the voice of the Anglo-Saxon. But the memory of Tostig—all guilty though he was—a brother slain in war with a brother, lay heavy on Harold's soul. Still, so had he schooled and trained himself to live but for England—know no joy and no woe not hers—that by degrees and strong efforts he shook off his gloom. And music, and song, and wine, and blazing lights, and the proud sight of those long lines of valiant men, whose hearts had beat and whose hands had triumphed in the same cause, all aided to link his senses with the gladness of the hour.

And now, as night advanced, Leofwine, who was ever a favourite in the banquet, as Gurth in the council, rose to propose the *drink-hœl*, which carries the most characteristic of our modern social customs to an antiquity so remote, and the roar was hushed at the sight of the young Earl's winsome face. With due decorum, he uncovered his head,[1] composed his countenance, and began:

"Craving forgiveness of my lord the King, and this noble assembly," said Leofwine, "in which are so many from whom what I intend to propose would come with better grace, I would remind you that William, Count of the Normans, meditates a pleasure excursion, of the same nature as our late visitor, Harold Hardrada's."

A scornful laugh ran through the hall.

"And as we English are hospitable folk, and give any man, who asks, meat and board for one night, so

[1] The Saxons sat at meals with their heads covered.

one day's welcome, methinks, will be all that the Count of the Normans will need at our English hands."

Flushed with the joyous insolence of wine, the wassailers roared applause.

"Wherefore, this *drink-hæl* to William of Rouen! And, to borrow a saying now in every man's lips, and which, I think, our good scops will take care that our children's children shall learn by heart,—since he covets our Saxon soil, 'seven feet of land' in frank pledge to him for ever!"

"*Drink-hæl* to William the Norman!" shouted the revellers; and each man, with mocking formality, took off his cap, kissed his hand, and bowed.[1] "*Drink-hæl* to William the Norman!" and the shout rolled from floor to roof—when, in the midst of the uproar, a man all bedabbled with dust and mire, rushed into the hall, rushed through the rows of the banqueters, rushed to the throne-chair of Harold, and cried aloud, "William the Norman is encamped on the shores of Sussex; and with the mightiest armament ever yet seen in England, is ravaging the land far and near!"

[1] Henry.

BOOK XII

THE BATTLE OF HASTINGS

CHAPTER I

In the heart of the forest land in which Hilda's abode was situated, a gloomy pool reflected upon its stagnant waters the still shadows of the autumnal foliage. As is common in ancient forests in the neighbourhood of men's wants, the trees were dwarfed in height by repeated loppings, and the boughs sprang from the hollow, gnarled boles of pollard oaks and beeches; the trunks, vast in girth, and covered with mosses and whitening canker-stains, or wreaths of ivy, spoke of the most remote antiquity: but the boughs with their lingering and mutilated life put forth, were either thin and feeble with innumerable branchlets, or were centred on some solitary distorted limb which the woodman's axe had spared. The trees thus assumed all manner of crooked, deformed, fantastic shapes—all betokening age, and all decay—all, in despite of the noiseless solitude around, proclaiming the waste and ravages of man.

The time was that of the first watches of night, when the autumnal moon was brightest and broadest. You might see, on the opposite side of the pool, the antlers of the deer every now and then, moving restlessly above the fern in which they had made their couch; and, through the nearer glades, the hares and conies

stealing forth to sport or to feed; or the bat, wheeling low, in chase of the forest moth. From the thickest part of the copse came a slow human foot, and Hilda, emerging, paused by the waters of the pool. That serene and stony calm habitual to her features was gone; sorrow and passion had seized the soul of the Vala, in the midst of its fancied security from the troubles it presumed to foresee for others. The lines of the face were deep and care-worn—age had come on with rapid strides—and the light of the eye was vague and unsettled, as if the lofty reason shook, terrified in its pride, at last.

"Alone, alone!" she murmured, half aloud: "yea, evermore alone! And the grandchild I had reared to be the mother of kings—whose fate, from the cradle, seemed linked with royalty and love—in whom, watching and hoping for, in whom, loving and heeding, methought I lived again the sweet human life—hath gone from my hearth—forsaken, broken-hearted—withering down to the grave under the shade of the barren cloister! Is mine heart, then, all a lie? Are the gods who led Odin from the Scythian East but the juggling fiends whom the craven Christian abhors? Lo! the Wine Month has come; a few nights more, and the sun which all prophecy foretold should go down on the union of the king and the maid, shall bring round the appointed day: yet Aldyth still lives, and Edith still withers; and War stands side by side with the Church, between the betrothed and the altar. Verily, verily, my spirit hath lost its power, and leaves me bowed, in the awe of night, a feeble, aged, hopeless, childless woman!"

Tears of human weakness rolled down the Vala's cheeks. At that moment, a laugh came from a thing

that had seemed like the fallen trunk of a tree, or a trough in which the herdsman waters his cattle, so still, and shapeless, and undefined it had lain amongst the rank weeds and night-shade and trailing creepers on the marge of the pool. The laugh was low yet fearful to hear.

Slowly, the thing moved, and rose, and took the outline of a human form; and the Prophetess beheld the witch whose sleep she had disturbed by the Saxon's grave.

"Where is the banner?" said the witch, laying her hand on Hilda's arm, and looking into her face with bleared and rheumy eyes, "where is the banner thy handmaids were weaving for Harold the Earl? Why didst thou lay aside that labour of love for Harold the King? Hie thee home, and bid thy maidens ply all night at the work; make it potent with rune and with spell, and with gums of the seid. Take the banner to Harold the King as a marriage-gift; for the day of his birth shall be still the day of his nuptials with Edith the Fair!"

Hilda gazed on the hideous form before her; and so had her soul fallen from its arrogant pride of place, that instead of the scorn with which so foul a pretender to the Great Art had before inspired the King-born Prophetess, her veins tingled with credulous awe.

"Art thou a mortal like myself," she said after a pause, "or one of those beings often seen by the shepherd in mist and rain, driving before them their shadowy flocks? one of those of whom no man knoweth whether they are of earth or of Helheim? whether they have ever known the lot and conditions of flesh, or are but some dismal race between body and spirit, hateful alike to gods and to men?"

The dreadful hag shook her head, as if refusing to answer the question, and said:

"Sit we down, sit we down by the dead dull pool, and if thou wouldst be wise as I am, wake up all thy wrongs, fill thyself with hate, and let thy thoughts be curses. Nothing is strong on earth but the Will; and hate to the will is as the iron in the hands of the warman."

"Ha!" answered Hilda, "then thou art indeed one of the loathsome brood whose magic is born, not of the aspiring soul, but the fiendlike heart. And between us there is no union. I am of the race of those whom priests and kings reverenced and honoured as the oracles of heaven; and rather let my lore be dimmed and weakened, in admitting the humanities of hope and love, than be lightened by the glare of the wrath that Lok and Rana bear the children of men."

"What, art thou so base and so doting," said the hag, with fierce contempt, "as to know that another has supplanted thine Edith, that all the schemes of thy life are undone, and yet feel no hate for the man who hath wronged her and thee?—the man who had never been king if thou hadst not breathed into him the ambition of rule? Think, and curse!"

"My curse would wither the heart that is entwined within his," answered Hilda; "and," she added abruptly, as if eager to escape from her own impulses, "didst thou not tell me, even now, that the wrong would be redressed, and his betrothed yet be his bride on the appointed day?"

"Ha! home, then!—home! and weave the charmed woof of the banner, broider it with zimmes and with gold worthy the standard of a king; for I tell thee,

that where that banner is planted, shall Edith clasp with bridal arms her adored. And the *hwata* thou hast read by the bautastein, and in the temple of the Briton's revengeful gods, shall be fulfilled."

"Dark daughter of Hela," said the Prophetess, "whether demon or god hath inspired thee, I hear in my spirit a voice that tells me thou hast pierced to a truth that my lore could not reach. Thou art houseless and poor; I will give wealth to thine age if thou wilt stand with me by the altar of Thor, and let thy galdra unriddle the secrets that have baffled mine own. All foreshown to me hath ever come to pass, but in a sense other than that in which my soul read the rune and the dream, the leaf and the fount, the star and the Scin-læca. My husband slain in his youth; my daughter maddened with woe; her lord murdered on his hearth-stone; Sweyn, whom I loved as my child,"—the Vala paused, contending against her own emotions,—"I loved them all," she faltered, clasping her hands, "for them I tasked the future. The future promised fair; I lured them to their doom, and when the doom came, lo! the promise was kept! but how? —and now, Edith, the last of my race; Harold, the pride of my pride!—speak, thing of Horror and Night, canst thou disentangle the web in which my soul struggles, weak as the fly in the spider's mesh?"

"On the third night from this, will I stand with thee by the altar of Thor, and unriddle the rede of my masters, unknown and unguessed, whom thou hadst duteously served. And ere the sun rise, the greatest mystery earth knows shall be bare to thy soul!"

As the witch spoke, a cloud passed over the moon; and before the light broke forth again, the hag had vanished. There was only seen in the dull pool, the

water-rat swimming through the rank sedges; only in the forest, the grey wings of the owl, fluttering heavily across the glades; only in the grass, the red eyes of the bloated toad.

Then Hilda went slowly home, and the maids worked all night at the charmed banner. All that night, too, the watch-dogs howled in the yard, through the ruined peristyle—howled in rage and in fear. And under the lattice of the room in which the maids broidered the banner, and the Prophetess muttered her charm, there crouched, muttering also, a dark, shapeless thing, at which those dogs howled in rage and in fear.

CHAPTER II

All within the palace of Westminster showed the confusion and dismay of the awful time;—all, at least, save the council-chamber, in which Harold, who had arrived the night before, conferred with his thegns. It was evening: the courtyards and the halls were filled with armed men, and almost with every hour came rider and bode from the Sussex shores. In the corridors the Churchmen grouped and whispered, as they had whispered and grouped in the day of King Edward's death. Stigand passed among them, pale and thoughtful. The serge gowns came rustling round the archprelate for counsel or courage.

"Shall we go forth with the King's army?" asked a young monk, bolder than the rest, "to animate the host with prayer and hymn?"

"Fool!" said the miserly prelate, "fool! if we do so, and the Norman conquer, what become of our

abbacies and convent lands? The Duke wars against Harold, not England. If he slay Harold——"

"What then?"

"The Atheling is left us yet. Stay we here and guard the last prince of the House of Cerdic," whispered Stigand, and he swept on.

In the chamber in which Edward had breathed his last, his widowed Queen, with Aldyth, her successor, and Githa and some other ladies, waited the decision of the council. By one of the windows stood, clasping each other by the hand, the fair young bride of Gurth and the betrothed of the gay Leofwine. Githa sate alone, bowing her face over her hands—desolate; mourning for the fate of her traitor son; and the wounds, that the recent and holier death of Thyra had inflicted, bled afresh. And the holy lady of Edward attempted in vain, by pious adjurations, to comfort Aldyth, who, scarcely heeding her, started ever and anon with impatient terror, muttering to herself, "Shall I lose *this* crown too?"

In the council-hall debate waxed warm,—which was the wiser, to meet William at once in the battle-field, or to delay till all the forces Harold might expect (and which he had ordered to be levied, in his rapid march from York) could swell his host?

"If we retire before the enemy," said Gurth, "leaving him in a strange land, winter approaching, his forage will fail. He will scarce dare to march upon London: if he does, we shall be better prepared to encounter him. My voice is against resting all on a single battle."

"Is that thy choice?" said Vebba, indignantly. "Not so, I am sure, would have chosen thy father; not so think the Saxons of Kent. The Norman is

laying waste all the lands of thy subjects, Lord Harold; living on plunder, as a robber, in the realm of King Alfred. Dost thou think that men will get better heart to fight for their country by hearing that their King shrinks from the danger?"

"Thou speakest well and wisely," said Haco; and all eyes turned to the young son of Sweyn, as to one who best knew the character of the hostile army and the skill of its chief. "We have now with us a force flushed with conquest over a foe hitherto deemed invincible. Men who have conquered the Norwegian will not shrink from the Norman. Victory depends upon ardour more than numbers. Every hour of delay damps the ardour. Are we sure that it will swell the numbers? What I dread most is not the sword of the Norman Duke, it is his craft. Rely upon it, that if we meet him not soon, he will march straight to London. He will proclaim by the way that he comes not to seize the throne, but to punish Harold, and abide by the Witan, or, perchance, by the word of the Roman pontiff. The terror of his armament, unresisted, will spread like a panic through the land. Many will be decoyed by his false pretexts, many awed by a force that the King dare not meet. If he come in sight of the city, think you that merchants and cheapmen will not be daunted by the thought of pillage and sack? They will be the first to capitulate at the first house which is fired. The city is weak to guard against siege; its walls long neglected; and in sieges the Normans are famous. Are we so united (the King's rule thus fresh) but what no cabals, no dissensions will break out amongst ourselves? If the Duke come, as come he will, in the name of the Church, may not the Churchmen set up some new

pretender to the crown—perchance the child Edgar? And, divided against ourselves, how ingloriously should we fall! Besides, this land, though never before have the links between province and province been drawn so close, hath yet demarcations that make the people selfish. The Northumbrians, I fear, will not stir to aid London, and Mercia will hold aloof from our peril. Grant that William once seize London, all England is broken up and dispirited; each shire, nay, each town, looking only to itself. Talk of delay as wearing out the strength of the foe! No, it would wear out our own. Little eno', I fear, is yet left in our treasury. If William seize London, that treasury is his, with all the wealth of our burgesses. How should we maintain an army, except by preying on the people, and thus discontenting them? Where guard that army? Where are our forts? where our mountains? The war of delay suits only a land of rock and defile, or of castle and breast-work. Thegns and warriors, ye have no castles but your breasts of mail. Abandon these, and you are lost."

A general murmur of applause closed this speech of Haco, which, while wise in arguments our historians have overlooked, came home to that noblest reason of brave men, which urges prompt resistance to foul invasion.

Up, then, rose King Harold.

"I thank you, fellow-Englishmen, for that applause with which ye have greeted mine own thoughts on the lips of Haco. Shall it be said that your King rushed to chase his own brother from the soil of outraged England, yet shrunk from the sword of the Norman stranger? Well indeed might my brave subjects desert my banner if it floated idly over these palace

walls while the armed invader pitched his camp in the heart of England. By delay, William's force, whatever it might be, cannot grow less; his cause grows more strong in our craven fears. What his armament may be we rightly know not; the report varies with every messenger, swelling and lessening with the rumours of every hour. Have we not around us now our most stalwart veterans—the flower of our armies—the most eager spirits—the vanquishers of Hardrada? Thou sayest, Gurth, that all should not be perilled on a single battle. True. Harold should be perilled, but wherefore England? Grant that we win the day; the quicker our despatch, the greater our fame, the more lasting that peace at home and abroad which rests ever its best foundation on the sense of the power which wrong cannot provoke unchastised. Grant that we lose; a loss can be made gain by a king's brave death. Why should not our example rouse and unite all who survive us? Which the nobler example—the one best fitted to protect our country—the recreant backs of living chiefs, or the glorious dead with their fronts to the foe? Come what may, life or death, at least we will thin the Norman numbers, and heap the barriers of our corpses on the Norman march. At least, we can show to the rest of England how men should defend their native land! And if, as I believe and pray, in every English breast beats a heart like Harold's, what matters though a king should fall?—Freedom is immortal."

He spoke; and forth from his baldric he drew his sword. Every blade, at that signal, leapt from the sheath: and, in that council-hall at least, in every breast beat the heart of Harold.

CHAPTER III

The chiefs dispersed to array their troops for the morrow's march; but Harold and his kinsmen entered the chamber where the women waited the decision of the council, for that, in truth, was to them the parting interview. The King had resolved, after completing all his martial preparations, to pass the night in the Abbey of Waltham; and his brothers lodged, with the troops they commanded, in the city or its suburbs. Haco alone remained with that portion of the army quartered in and around the palace.

They entered the chamber, and in a moment each heart had sought its mate; in the mixed assembly each only conscious of the other. There, Gurth bowed his noble head over the weeping face of the young bride that for the last time nestled to his bosom. There, with a smiling lip, but tremulous voice, the gay Leofwine soothed and chided in a breath the maiden he had wooed as the partner for a life that his mirthful spirit made one holiday; snatching kisses from a cheek no longer coy.

But cold was the kiss which Harold pressed on the brow of Aldyth; and with something of disdain, and of bitter remembrance of a nobler love, he comforted a terror which sprang from the thought of self.

"Oh, Harold!" sobbed Aldyth, "be not rashly brave: guard thy life for my sake. Without thee, what am I? Is it even safe for me to rest here? Were it not better to fly to York, or seek refuge with Malcolm the Scot?"

"Within three days at the farthest," answered Harold, "thy brothers will be in London. Abide by their

counsel; act as they advise at the news of my victory or my fall."

He paused abruptly, for he heard close beside him the broken voice of Gurth's bride, in answer to her lord.

"Think not of me, beloved; thy whole heart now be England's. And if—if"—her voice failed a moment, but resumed proudly, "why even then thy wife is safe, for she survives not her lord and her land!"

The King left his wife's side, and kissed his brother's bride.

"Noble heart!" he said; "with women like thee for our wives and mothers, England could survive the slaughter of a thousand kings."

He turned, and knelt to Githa. She threw her arms over his broad breast, and wept bitterly.

"Say—say, Harold, that I have not reproached thee for Tostig's death. I have obeyed the last commands of Godwin my lord. I have deemed thee ever right and just; now let me not lose thee, too. They go with thee, all my surviving sons, save the exile Wolnoth,—him whom now I shall never behold again. Oh, Harold!—let not mine old age be childless!"

"Mother,—dear, dear mother, with these arms round my neck I take new life and new heart. No! never hast thou reproached me for my brother's death —never for aught which man's first duty enjoined. Murmur not that that duty commands us still. We are the sons, through thee, of royal heroes; through my father, of Saxon freemen. Rejoice that thou hast three sons left, whose arms thou mayest pray God and his saints to prosper, and over whose graves, if they fall, thou shalt shed no tears of shame!"

Then the widow of King Edward, who (the crucifix

clasped in her hands) had listened to Harold with lips apart and marble cheeks, could keep down no longer her human woman's heart; she rushed to Harold as he still knelt to Githa—knelt by his side, and clasped him in her arms with despairing fondness:

"O brother, brother, whom I have so dearly loved when all other love seemed forbidden me;—when he who gave me a throne refused me his heart; when, looking at thy fair promise, listening to thy tender comfort,—when, remembering the days of old, in which thou wert my docile pupil, and we dreamed bright dreams together of happiness and fame to come,—when, loving thee methought too well, too much as weak mothers may love a mortal son, I prayed God to detach my heart from earth!—Oh, Harold! now forgive me all my coldness. I shudder at thy resolve. I dread that thou should meet this man, whom an oath hath bound thee to obey. Nay, frown not—I bow to thy will, my brother and my King. I know that thou hast chosen as thy conscience sanctions, as thy duty ordains. But come back—Oh, come back—thou who, like me," (her voice whispered,) "hast sacrificed the household hearth to thy country's altars,—and I will never pray to Heaven to love thee less—my brother, O my brother!"

In all the room were then heard but the low sounds of sobs and broken exclamations. All clustered to one spot—Leofwine and his betrothed—Gurth and his bride—even the selfish Aldyth, ennobled by the contagion of the sublime emotion,—all clustered round Githa, the mother of the three guardians of the fated land, and all knelt before her, by the side of Harold. Suddenly, the widowed Queen, the virgin wife of the last heir of Cerdic, rose, and holding on

high the sacred rood over those bended heads, said, with devout passion:

"O Lord of Hosts—We Children of Doubt and Time, trembling in the dark, dare not take to ourselves to question thine unerring will. Sorrow and death, as joy and life, are at the breath of a mercy divine, and a wisdom all-seeing: and out of the hours of evil thou drawest, in mystic circle, the eternity of Good. 'Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.' If, O Disposer of events, our human prayers are not adverse to thy pre-judged decrees, protect these lives, the bulwarks of our homes and altars, sons whom the land offers as a sacrifice. May thine angel turn aside the blade—as of old from the heart of Isaac! But if, O Ruler of Nations, in whose sight the ages are as moments, and generations but as sands in the sea, these lives are doomed, may the death expiate their sins, and, shrived on the battle-field, absolve and receive the souls!"

CHAPTER IV

By the altar of the Abbey Church of Waltham, that night, knelt Edith in prayer for Harold.

She had taken up her abode in a small convent of nuns that adjoined the more famous monastery of Waltham; but she had promised Hilda not to enter on the novitiate, until the birthday of Harold had passed. She herself had no longer faith in the omens and prophecies that had deceived her youth and darkened her life; and, in the more congenial air of our Holy Church, the spirit, ever so chastened, grew calm and resigned. But the tidings of the Norman's coming,

and the King's victorious return to his capital, had reached even that still retreat; and love, which had blent itself with religion, led her steps to that lonely altar. And suddenly, as she there knelt, only lighted by the moon through the high casements, she was startled by the sound of approaching feet and murmuring voices. She rose in alarm—the door of the church was thrown open—torches advanced—and amongst the monks, between Osgood and Ailred, came the King. He had come, that last night before his march, to invoke the prayers of that pious brotherhood; and by the altar he had founded, to pray, himself, that his one sin of faith forfeited and oath abjured, might not palsy his arm and weigh on his soul in the hour of his country's need.

Edith stifled the cry that rose to her lips, as the torches fell on the pale and hushed and melancholy face of Harold; and she crept away under the arch of the vast Saxon columns, and into the shade of abutting walls. The monks and the King, intent on their holy office, beheld not that solitary and shrinking form. They approached the altar; and there the King knelt down lowlily, and none heard the prayer. But as Osgood held the sacred rood over the bended head of the royal suppliant, the Image on the crucifix (which had been a gift from Alred the prelate, and was supposed to have belonged of old to Augustine, the first founder of the Saxon Church—so that, by the superstition of the age, it was invested with miraculous virtues)—bowed itself visibly. Visibly, the pale and ghastly image of the suffering God bowed over the head of the kneeling man; whether the fastenings of the rood were loosened, or from what cause soever,

—in the eyes of all the brotherhood, the Image bowed.[1]

A thrill of terror froze every heart, save Edith's, too remote to perceive the portent, and save the King's, whom the omen seemed to doom, for his face was buried in his clasped hands. Heavy was his heart, nor needed it other warnings than its own gloom.

Long and silently prayed the King; and when at last he rose, and the monks, though with altered and tremulous voices, began their closing hymn, Edith passed noiselessly along the wall, and, stealing through one of the smaller doors which communicated to the nunnery annexed, gained the solitude of her own chamber. There she stood, benumbed with the strength of her emotions at the sight of Harold thus abruptly presented. How had the fond human heart leapt to meet him! Twice, thus, in the august ceremonials of Religion, secret, shrinking, unwitnessed, had she, his betrothed, she, the partner of his soul, stood aloof to behold him. She had seen him in the hour of his pomp, the crown upon his brow,—seen him in the hour of his peril and agony, that anointed head bowed to the earth. And in the pomp that she could not share, she had exulted; but, oh, now —now,—oh now that she could have knelt beside that humbled form, and prayed with that voiceless prayer!

The torches flashed in the court below; the church was again deserted; the monks passed in mute procession back to their cloister; but a single man paused, turned aside, and stopped at the gate of the humbler convent: a knocking was heard at the great oaken

[1] Palgrave—"Hist. of Anglo-Saxons."

door, and the watch-dog barked. Edith started, pressed her hand on her heart and trembled. Steps approached her door—and the abbess, entering, summoned her below, to hear the farewell greeting of her cousin the King.

Harold stood in the simple hall of the cloister: a single taper, tall and wan, burned on the oak board. The abbess led Edith by the hand, and at a sign from the King, withdrew. So, once more upon earth, the betrothed and divided were alone.

"Edith," said the King, in a voice in which no ear but hers could have detected the struggle, "do not think I have come to disturb thy holy calm, or sinfully revive the memories of the irrevocable past: where once on my breast, in the old fashion of our fathers, I wrote thy name, is written now the name of the mistress that supplants thee. Into Eternity melts the Past; but I could not depart to a field from which there is no retreat—in which, against odds that men say are fearful, I have resolved to set my crown and my life—without once more beholding thee, pure guardian of my happier days! Thy forgiveness for all the sorrow that, in the darkness which surrounds man's hopes and dreams, I have brought on thee (dread return for love so enduring, so generous and divine!)—thy forgiveness I will not ask. Thou alone perhaps on earth knowest the soul of Harold; and if he hath wronged thee, thou seest alike in the wronger and the wronged, but the children of iron Duty, the servants of imperial Heaven. Not thy forgiveness I ask—but—but—Edith, holy maid! angel soul!—thy —thy blessing!" His voice faltered, and he inclined his lofty head as to a saint.

"Oh that I had the power to bless!" exclaimed

Edith, mastering her rush of tears with a heroic effort; "and methinks I have the power—not from virtues of my own, but from all that I owe to thee! The grateful have the power to bless. For what do I not owe to thee—owe to that very love of which even the grief is sacred? Poor child in the house of the heathen, thy love descended upon me, and in it, the smile of God! In that love my spirit awoke, and was baptised: every thought that has risen from earth, and lost itself in heaven, was breathed into my heart by thee! Thy creature and thy slave, hadst thou tempted me to sin, sin had seemed hallowed by thy voice; but thou saidst 'True love is virtue,' and so I worshipped virtue in loving thee. Strengthened, purified, by thy bright companionship, from thee came the strength to resign thee—from thee the refuge under the wings of God—from thee the firm assurance that our union yet shall be—not as our poor Hilda dreams, on the perishable earth,—but there! oh, there! yonder by the celestial altars, in the land in which all spirits are filled with love. Yes, soul of Harold! there are might and holiness in the blessing the soul thou hast redeemed and reared sheds on thee!"

And so beautiful, so unlike the Beautiful of the common earth, looked the maid as she thus spoke, and laid hands, trembling with no human passion, on that royal head—that could a soul from paradise be made visible, such might be the shape it would wear to a mortal's eye! Thus, for some moments both were silent; and in the silence the gloom vanished from the heart of Harold, and, through a deep and sublime serenity, it rose undaunted to front the future.

No embrace—no farewell kiss—profaned the parting of those pure and noble spirits—parting on the threshold of the grave. It was only the spirit that clasped the spirit, looking forth from the clay into measureless eternity. Not till the air of night came once more on his brow, and the moonlight rested on the roofs and fanes of the land entrusted to his charge, was the man once more the human hero; not till she was alone in her desolate chamber, and the terrors of the coming battle-field chased the angel from her thoughts was the maid inspired, once more the weeping woman.

A little after sunrise the abbess, who was distantly akin to the house of Godwin, sought Edith, so agitated by her own fear, that she did not remark the trouble of her visitor. The supposed miracle of the sacred Image bowing over the kneeling King, had spread dismay through the cloisters of both nunnery and abbey; and so intense was the disquietude of the two brothers, Osgood and Ailred, in the simple and grateful affection they bore their royal benefactor, that they had obeyed the impulse of their tender credulous hearts, and left the monastery with the dawn, intending to follow the King's march,[1] and watch and pray near the awful battle-field. Edith listened, and made no reply; the terrors of the abbess infected her; the example of the two monks woke the sole thought which stirred through the nightmare dream that suspended reason itself; and when, at noon the abbess again sought the chamber, Edith was gone;—gone, and alone — none knew wherefore — one guessed whither.

All the pomp of the English army burst upon Har-

[1] Palgrave—"Hist. of Anglo-Saxons."

old's view, as, in the rising sun, he approached the bridge of the capital. Over that bridge came the stately march,—battle-axe, and spear, and banner, glittering in the ray. And as he drew aside, and the forces filed before him, the cry of, "God save King Harold!" rose with loud acclaim and lusty joy, borne over the waves of the river, startling the echoes in the ruined keape of the Roman, heard in the halls restored by Canute, and chiming, like a chorus, with the chaunts of the monks by the tomb of Sebba in St. Paul's—by the tomb of Edward at St. Peter's.

With a brightened face, and a kindling eye, the King saluted his lines, and then fell into the ranks towards the rear, where among the burghers of London and the lithsmen of Middlesex, the immemorial custom of Saxon monarchs placed the kingly banner. And, looking up, he beheld, not his old standard with the Tiger heads and the Cross, but a banner both strange and gorgeous. On a field of gold was the effigies of a Fighting Warrior; and the arms were bedecked in orient pearls, and the borders blazed in the rising sun, with ruby, amethyst, and emerald. While he gazed, wondering, on this dazzling ensign, Haco, who rode beside the standard-bearer, advanced, and gave him a letter.

"Last night," said he, "after thou hadst left the palace, many recruits, chiefly from Hertfordshire and Essex, came in; but the most gallant and stalwart of all, in arms and in stature, were the lithsmen of Hilda. With them came this banner, on which she has lavished the gems that have passed to her hand through long lines of northern ancestors, from Odin, the founder of all northern thrones. So, at least, said the bode of our kinswoman."

Harold had already cut the silk round the letter, and was reading its contents. They ran thus:—

"King of England, I forgive thee the broken heart of my grandchild. They whom the land feeds, should defend the land. I send to thee, in tribute the best fruits that grow in the field, and the forest, round the house which my husband took from the bounty of Canute;—stout hearts and strong hands! Descending alike, as do Hilda and Harold (through Githa thy mother,) from the Warrior God of the North, whose race never shall fail—take, O defender of the Saxon children of Odin, the banner I have broidered with the gems that the Chief of the Asas bore from the East. Firm as love be thy foot, strong as death be thy hand, under the shade which the banner of Hilda,—under the gleam which the jewels of Odin,—cast on the brows of the King! So Hilda, the daughter of monarchs, greets Harold the leader of men."

Harold looked up from the letter, and Haco resumed:

"Thou canst guess not the cheering effect which this banner, supposed to be charmed, and which the name of Odin alone would suffice to make holy, at least with thy fierce Anglo-Danes, hath already produced through the army."

"It is well, Haco," said Harold with a smile. "Let priest add his blessing to Hilda's charm, and Heaven will pardon any magic that makes more brave the hearts that defend its altars. Now fall we back, for the army must pass beside the hill with the crommell and gravestone; there, be sure, Hilda will be at watch for our march, and we will linger a few moments to thank her somewhat for her banner, yet more justly, methinks, for her men. Are not yon stout

fellows all in mail, so tall and so orderly, in advance of the London burghers, Hilda's aid to our Fyrd?"

"They are," answered Haco.

The King backed his steed to accost them with his kingly greeting; and then, with Haco, falling yet farther to the rear seemed engaged in inspecting the numerous wains, bearing missiles and forage, that always accompanied the march of a Saxon army, and served to strengthen its encampment. But when they came in sight of the hillock by which the great body of the army had preceded them, the King and the son of Sweyn dismounted and on foot entered the large circle of the Celtic ruin.

By the side of the Teuton altar they beheld two forms, both perfectly motionless: but one was extended on the ground as in sleep or in death; the other sate beside it, as if watching the corpse, or guarding the slumber. The face of the last was not visible, propped upon the arms which rested on the knees, and hidden by the hands. But in the face of the other, as the two men drew near, they recognised the Danish Prophetess. Death in its dreadest characters was written on that ghastly face; woe and terror, beyond all words to describe, spoke in the haggard brow, the distorted lips, and the wild glazed stare of the open eyes. At the startled cry of the intruders on that dreary silence, the living form moved; and though still leaning its face on its hands, it raised its head; and never countenance of Northern Vampire, cowering by the rifled grave, was more fiend-like and appalling.

"Who and what art thou?" said the King; "and how, thus unhonored in the air of heaven, lies the

corpse of the noble Hilda? Is this the hand of Nature? Haco, Haco, so look the eyes, so set the features, of those whom the horror of ruthless murder slays even before the steel strikes. Speak, hag, art thou dumb?"

"Search the body," answered the witch, "there is no wound! Look to the throat,—no mark of the deadly gripe! I have seen such in my day.—There are none on this corpse, I trow; yet thou sayest rightly, horror slew her! Ha, ha! she would know, and she hath known; she would raise the dead and the demon; she hath raised them; she would read the riddle,—she hath read it. Pale King and dark youth, would ye learn what Hilda saw, eh? eh? Ask her in the Shadow-World where she awaits ye! Ha! ye too would be wise in the future; ye too would climb to heaven through the mysteries of hell. Worms! worms! crawl back to the clay—to the earth! One such night as the hag ye despise enjoys as her sport and her glee, would freeze your veins, and sear the life in your eyeballs, and leave your corpses to terror and wonder, like the carcase that lies at your feet!"

"Ho!" cried the King, stamping his foot. "Hence, Haco; rouse the household; summon hither the handmaids; call henchman and ceorl to guard this foul raven."

Haco obeyed; but when he returned with the shuddering and amazed attendants, the witch was gone, and the King was leaning against the altar with downcast eyes, and a face troubled and dark with thought.

The body of the Vala was borne into the house; and the King, waking from his reverie, bade them send for the priests and ordered masses for the parted soul.

Then kneeling, with pious hand he closed the eyes and smoothed the features, and left his mournful kiss on the icy brow. These offices fulfilled, he took Haco's arm, and leaning on it, returned to the spot on which they had left their steeds. Not evincing surprise or awe,—emotions that seemed unknown to his gloomy, settled, impassible nature—Haco said calmly, as they descended the knoll:

"What evil did the hag predict to thee?"

"Haco," answered the King, "yonder, by the shores of Sussex, lies all the future which our eyes now should scan, and our hearts should be firm to meet. These omens and apparitions are but the ghosts of a dead Religion; spectres sent from the grave of the fearful Heathenesse; they may appal but to lure us from our duty. Lo, as we gaze around—the ruins of all the creeds that have made the hearts of men quake with unsubstantial awe—lo, the temple of the Briton!—lo, the fane of the Roman!—lo, the mouldering altar of our ancestral Thor! Ages past lie wrecked around us in these shattered symbols. A new age hath risen, and a new creed. Keep we to the broad truths before us; duty here; knowledge comes alone in the Hereafter."

"That Hereafter!—is it not near?" murmured Haco.

They mounted in silence; and ere they regained the army paused, by a common impulse, and looked behind. Awful in their desolation rose the temple and the altar! And in Hilda's mysterious death it seemed that their last and lingering Genius,—the Genius of the dark and fierce, the war-like and the wizard North, had expired for ever. Yet, on the outskirt of the forest, dusk and shapeless, that witch without a name

stood in the shadow, pointing towards them, with outstretched arm, in vague and denouncing menace;—as if, come what may, all change of creed,—be the faith ever so simple, the truth ever so bright and clear,—there *is* a SUPERSTITION native to that Border-land between the Visible and the Unseen, which will find its priest and its votaries, till the full and crowning splendour of Heaven shall melt every shadow from the world!

CHAPTER V

On the broad plain between Pevensey and Hastings, Duke William had arrayed his armaments. In the rear he had built a castle of wood, all the framework of which he had brought with him, and which was to serve as a refuge in case of retreat. His ships he had run into deep water, and scuttled; so that the thought of return, without victory, might be banished from his miscellaneous and multitudinous force. His outposts stretched for miles, keeping watch night and day against surprise. The ground chosen was adapted for all the manœuvres of a cavalry never before paralleled in England nor perhaps in the world,—almost every horseman a knight, almost every knight fit to be a chief. And on this space William reviewed his army, and there planned and schemed, rehearsed and re-formed, all the stratagems the great day might call forth. But most careful, and laborious, and minute, was he in the manœuvre of a feigned retreat. Not ere the acting of some modern play, does the anxious manager more elaborately marshal

each man, each look, each gesture, that are to form a picture on which the curtain shall fall amidst deafening plaudits than did the laborious captain appoint each man, and each movement, in his lure to a valiant foe:—The attack of the foot, their recoil, their affected panic, their broken exclamations of despair;—their retreat, first partial and reluctant, next seemingly hurried and complete,—flying, but in flight *carefully* confused:—then the settled watchword, the lightning rally, the rush of the cavalry from the ambush; the sweep and hem round the pursuing foe, the detachment of levelled spears to cut off the Saxon return to the main force, and the lost ground,—were all directed by the most consummate mastership in the stage play, or *upokrisis*, of war, and seized by the adroitness of practised veterans.

Not now, O Harold! hast thou to contend against the rude heroes of the Norse, with their ancestral strategy unimproved! The civilisation of Battle meets thee now!—and all the craft of the Roman guides the manhood of the North.

It was in the midst of such lessons to his foot and his horsemen—spears gleaming—pennons tossing—lines re-forming—steeds backing, wheeling, flying, circling—that William's eye blazed, and his deep voice thundered the thrilling word; when Mallet de Graville, who was in command of one of the outposts, rode up to him at full speed, and said in gasps, as he drew breath:

"King Harold and his army are advancing furiously. Their object is clearly to come on us unawares."

"Hold!" said the Duke, lifting his hand; and the knights around him halted in their perfect discipline;

then after a few brief but distinct orders to Odo, Fitz-osborne, and some other of his leading chiefs, he headed a numerous cavalcade of his knights, and rode fast to the outpost which Mallet had left,—to catch sight of the coming foe.

The horsemen cleared the plain—passed through a wood, mournfully fading into autumnal hues—and, on emerging, they saw the gleam of the Saxon spears rising on the brows of the gentle hills beyond. But even the time, short as it was, that had sufficed to bring William in view of the enemy, had sufficed also, under the orders of his generals, to give to the wide plain of his encampment all the order of a host prepared. And William, having now mounted on a rising ground, turned from the spears on the hill tops, to his own fast forming lines on the plain, and said with a stern smile:

"Methinks the Saxon usurper, if he be among those on the height of yon hills, will vouchsafe us time to breathe! St. Michael gives his crown to our hands, and his corpse to the crow, if he dare to descend."

And so indeed, as the Duke with a soldier's eye foresaw from a soldier's skill, so it proved. The spears rested on the summits. It soon became evident that the English general perceived that here there was no Hardrada to surprise; that the news brought to his ear had exaggerated neither the numbers, nor the arms, nor the discipline of the Norman; and that the battle was not to the bold but to the wary.

"He doth right," said William, musingly; "nor think, O my Quens, that we shall find a fool's hot brain under Harold's helmet of iron. How is this broken ground of hillock and valley named in our

chart? It is strange that we should have overlooked its strength, and suffered it thus to fall into the hands of the foe. How is it named? Can any of ye remember?"

"A Saxon peasant," said De Graville, "told me that the ground was called Senlac[1] or Sanglac, or some such name, in their musicless jargon."

"Grammercy!" quoth Grantmesnil, "methinks the name will be familiar eno' hereafter; no jargon seemeth the sound to my ear—a significant name and ominous,—Sanglac, Sanguelac—the Lake of Blood."

"Sanguelac!" said the Duke, startled; "where have I heard that name before? it must have been between sleeping and waking.—Sanguelac, Sanguelac!—truly sayest thou, through a lake of blood we must wade indeed!"

"Yet," said De Graville, "thine astrologer foretold that thou wouldst win the realm without a battle."

"Poor astrologer!" said William, "the ship he sailed in was lost. Ass indeed is he who pretends to warn others, nor sees an inch before his eyes what his own fate will be! Battle shall we have, but not yet. Hark thee, Guillaume, thou hast been guest with this usurper; thou hast seemed to me to have some love for him—a love natural since thou didst once fight by his side; wilt thou go from me to the Saxon host with Hugues Maigrot, the monk, and back the message I shall send?"

The proud and punctilious Norman thrice crossed himself ere he answered:

"There was a time, Count William, when I should

[1] The battle-field of Hastings seems to have been called Senlac, before the Conquest, Sanguelac after it.

have deemed it honour to hold parle with Harold the brave Earl; but now, with the crown on his head, I hold it shame and disgrace to barter words with a knight unleal and a man foresworn."

"Nathless, thou shalt do me this favour," said William, "for" (and he took the knight somewhat aside) "I cannot disguise from thee that I look anxiously on the chance of battle. Yon men are flushed with new triumph over the greatest warrior Norway ever knew, they will fight on their own soil, and under a chief whom I have studied and read with more care than the Comments of Cæsar, and in whom the guilt of perjury cannot blind me to the wit of a great general. If we can yet get our end without battle, large shall be my thanks to thee, and I will hold thine astrologer a man wise, though unhappy."

"Certes," said De Graville gravely, "it were discourteous to the memory of the star-seer, not to make some effort to prove his science a just one. And the Chaldeans——"

"Plague seize the Chaldeans!" muttered the Duke. "Ride with me back to the camp, that I may give thee my message, and instruct also the monk."

"De Graville," resumed the Duke, as they rode towards the lines, "my meaning is briefly this. I do not think that Harold will accept my offer and resign his crown, but I design to spread dismay, and perhaps revolt amongst his captains; I wish that they may know that the Church lays its Curse on those who fight against my consecrated banner. I do not ask thee, therefore, to demean thy knighthood, by seeking to cajole the usurper; no, but rather boldly to denounce his perjury and startle his liegemen. Per-

chance they may compel him to terms—perchance they may desert his banner; at the worst they shall be daunted with full sense of the guilt of his cause."

"Ha, now I comprehend thee, noble Count; and trust me I will speak as Norman and knight should speak."

Meanwhile, Harold seeing the utter hopelessness of all sudden assault, had seized a general's advantage of the ground he had gained. Occupying the line of hills, he began forthwith to entrench himself behind deep ditches and artful palisades. It is impossible now to stand on that spot, without recognising the military skill with which the Saxon had taken his post, and formed his precautions. He surrounded the main body of his troops with a perfect breastwork against the charge of the horse. Stakes and strong hurdles interwoven with osier plaits, and protected by deep dykes, served at once to neutralise the effect of that arm in which William was most powerful, and in which Harold almost entirely failed; while the possession of the ground must compel the foe to march, and to charge, up hill, against all the missiles which the Saxons could pour down from their entrenchments.

Aiding, animating, cheering, directing all, while the dykes were fast hollowed, and the breastworks fast rose, the King of England rode his palfrey from line to line, and work to work, when, looking up, he saw Haco leading towards him up the slopes, a monk, and a warrior whom, by the banderol on his spear and the cross on his shield, he knew to be one of the Norman knighthood.

At that moment Gurth and Leofwine, and those

thegns who commanded counties, were thronging round their chief for instructions. The King dismounted, and beckoning them to follow, strode towards the spot on which had just been planted his royal standard. There halting, he said with a grave smile:

"I perceive that the Norman Count hath sent us his bodes; it is meet that with me, you, the defenders of England, should hear what the Norman saith."

"If he saith aught but prayer for his men to return to Rouen,—needless his message, and short our answer," said Vebba, the bluff thegn of Kent.

Meanwhile the monk and the Norman knight drew near and paused at some short distance, while Haco, advancing, said briefly:

"These men I found at our outposts; they demand to speak with the King."

"Under his standard the King will hear the Norman invader," replied Harold; "bid them speak."

The same sallow, mournful, ominous countenance, which Harold had before seen in the halls of Westminster, rising deathlike above the serge garb of the Benedict of Caen, now presented itself, and the monk thus spoke:

"In the name of William, Duke of the Normans in the field, Count of Rouen in the hall, Claimant of all the realms of Anglia, Scotland, and the Walloons, held under Edward his cousin, I come to thee, Harold his liege and Earl."

"Change thy titles, or depart," said Harold, fiercely, his brow no longer mild in its majesty, but dark as midnight. "What says William the Count of the

Foreigners, to Harold, King of the Angles, and Basileus of Britain?"

"Protesting against thy assumption, I answer thee thus," said Hugues Maigrot. "First, again he offers thee all Northumbria, up to the realm of the Scottish sub-king, if thou wilt fulfil thy vow, and cede him the crown."

"Already have I answered,—the crown is not mine to give; and my people stand round me in arms to defend the king of their choice. What next?"

"Next, offers William to withdraw his troops from the land, if thou and thy council and chiefs will submit to the arbitrament of our most holy Pontiff, Alexander the Second, and abide by his decision whether thou or my liege have the best right to the throne."

"This, as Churchman," said the Abbot of the great Convent of Peterboro' (who, with the Abbot of Hide, had joined the march of Harold, deeming as one the cause of altar and throne), "this as Churchman, may *I* take leave to answer. Never yet hath it been heard in England, that the spiritual suzerain of Rome should give us our kings."

"And," said Harold, with a bitter smile, "the Pope hath already summoned me to this trial, as if the laws of England were kept in the rolls of the Vatican! Already, if rightly informed, the Pope hath been pleased to decide that our Saxon land is the Norman's. I reject a judge without a right to decide; and I mock at a sentence that profanes heaven in its insult to men. Is this all?"

"One last offer yet remains," replied the monk sternly. "This knight shall deliver its import. But ere I depart, and thou and thine are rendered up to

Vengeance Divine, I speak the words of a mightier chief than William of Rouen. Thus saith his Holiness, with whom rests the power to bind and to loose, to bless and to curse: 'Harold, the Perjurer, thou art accursed! On thee and on all who lift hand in thy cause, rests the interdict of the Church. Thou art excommunicated from the family of Christ. On thy land, with its peers and its people, yea, to the beast in the field and the bird in the air, to the seed as the sower, the harvest as the reaper, rests God's anathema! The bull of the Vatican is in the tent of the Norman; the gonfanon of St. Peter hallows yon armies to the service of Heaven. March on, then: ye march as the Assyrian; and the angel of the Lord awaits ye on the way!'"

At these words, which for the first time apprised the English leaders that their king and kingdom were under the awful ban of excommunication, the thegns and abbots gazed on each other aghast. A visible shudder passed over the whole warlike conclave, save only three, Harold, and Gurth, and Haco.

The King himself was so moved by indignation at the insolence of the monk, and by scorn at the fulmen, which, resting not alone on his own head, presumed to blast the liberties of a nation, that he strode towards the speaker, and it is even said of him by the Norman chroniclers, that he raised his hand as if to strike the denouncer to the earth.

But Gurth interposed, and with his clear eye serenely shining with virtuous passion, he stood betwixt monk and king.

"O thou," he exclaimed, "with the words of religion on thy lips, and the devices of fraud in thy heart, hide thy front in thy cowl, and slink back to thy mas-

ter. Heard ye not, thegns and abbots, heard ye not this bad, false man offer, as if for peace, and as with the desire of justice, that the Pope should arbitrate between your King and the Norman? yet all the while the monk knew that the Pope had already predetermined the cause; and had ye fallen into the wile, ye would but have cowered under the verdict of a judgment that has presumed, even before it invoked ye to the trial, to dispose of a free people and an ancient kingdom!"

"It is true, it is true," cried the thegns, rallying from their first superstitious terror, and, with their plain English sense of justice, revolted at the perfidy which the priest's overtures had concealed. "We will hear no more; away with the Swikebode."[1]

The pale cheek of the monk turned yet paler, he seemed abashed by the storm of resentment he had provoked; and in some fear, perhaps, at the dark faces bent on him, he slunk behind his comrade the knight, who as yet had said nothing, but, his face concealed by his helmet, stood motionless like a steel statue. And, in fact, these two ambassadors, the one in his monk garb, the other in his iron array, were types and representatives of the two forces now brought to bear upon Harold and England—Chivalry and the Church.

At the momentary discomfiture of the Priest, now stood forth the Warrior; and, throwing back his helmet, so that the whole steel cap rested on the nape of the neck, leaving the haughty face and half-shaven head bare, Mallet de Graville thus spoke:

"The ban of the Church is against ye, warriors and

[1] Traitor-messenger.

chiefs of England, but for the crime of one man! Remove it from yourselves: on his single head be the curse and the consequence. Harold, called King of England—failing the two milder offers of my comrade, thus saith from the lips of his knight, (once thy guest, thy admirer, and friend,) thus saith William the Norman:—'Though sixty thousand warriors under the banner of the Apostle wait at his beck, (and from what I see of thy force, thou canst marshal to thy guilty side scarce a third of the number,) yet will Count William lay aside all advantage, save what dwells in strong arm and good cause; and here, in presence of thy thegns, I challenge thee in his name to decide the sway of this realm by single battle. On horse and in mail, with sword and with spear, knight to knight, man to man, wilt thou meet William the Norman?'"

Before Harold could reply, and listen to the first impulse of a valour, which his worst Norman maligner, in the after day of triumphant calumny, never so lied as to impugn, the thegns themselves almost with one voice, took up the reply.

"No strife between a man and a man shall decide the liberties of thousands!"

"Never!" exclaimed Gurth. "It were an insult to the whole people to regard this as a strife between two chiefs,—which should wear a crown. When the invader is in our land, the war is with a nation, not a king. And, by the very offer, this Norman Count (who cannot even speak our tongue) shows how little he knows of the laws, by which, under our native kings, we have all as great an interest as a king himself in our Fatherland."

"Thou hast heard the answer of England from

those lips, Sire de Graville," said Harold: "mine but repeat and sanction it. I will not give the crown to William in lieu for disgrace and an earldom. I will not abide by the arbitrament of a Pope who has dared to affix a curse upon freedom. I will not so violate the principle which in these realms knits king and people, as to arrogate to my single arm the right to dispose of the birthright of the living, and their races unborn; nor will I deprive the meanest soldier under my banner, of the joy and the glory to fight for his native land. If William seek me, he shall find me, where war is the fiercest, where the corpses of his men lie the thickest on the plains, defending this standard, or rushing on his own. And so, not Monk and Pope, but God in his wisdom, adjudge between us!"

"So be it," said Mallet de Graville, solemnly, and his helmet re-closed over his face. "Look to it, recreant knight, perjured Christian, and usurping King! The bones of the Dead fight against thee."

"And the fleshless hands of the Saints marshal the hosts of the living," said the monk.

And so the messengers turned, without obeisance or salute, and strode silently away.

CHAPTER VI

The rest of that day, and the whole of the next, were consumed by both armaments in the completion of their preparations.

William was willing to delay the engagement as long as he could; for he was not without hope that Har-

old might abandon his formidable position, and become the assailing party; and, moreover, he wished to have full time for his prelates and priests to inflame to the utmost, by their representations of William's moderation in his embassy, and Harold's presumptuous guilt in rejection, the fiery fanaticism of all enlisted under the gonfanon of the Church.

On the other hand, every delay was of advantage to Harold, in giving him leisure to render his entrenchments yet more effectual, and to allow time for such reinforcements as his orders had enjoined, or the patriotism of the country might arouse; but, alas! those reinforcements were scanty and insignificant; a few stragglers in the immediate neighbourhood arrived, but no aid came from London, no indignant country poured forth a swarming population. In fact, the very fame of Harold, and the good fortune that had hitherto attended his arms, contributed to the stupid lethargy of the people. That he who had just subdued the terrible Norsemen, with the mighty Hardrada at their head, should succumb to those dainty "Frenchmen," as they chose to call the Normans; of whom, in their insular ignorance of the continent, they knew but little, and whom they had seen flying in all directions at the return of Godwin; was a preposterous demand on the imagination.

Nor was this all: in London there had already formed a cabal in favour of the Atheling. The claims of birth can never be so wholly set aside, but what, even for the most unworthy heir of an ancient line, some adherents will be found. The prudent traders thought it best not to engage actively on behalf of the reigning King, in his present combat with the Nor-

man pretender; a large number of would-be statesmen thought it best for the country to remain for the present neutral. Grant the worst—grant that Harold were defeated or slain; would it not be wise to reserve their strength to support the Atheling? William might have some personal cause of quarrel against Harold, but he could have none against Edgar; he might depose the son of Godwin, but could he dare to depose the descendant of Cerdic, the natural heir of Edward? There is reason to think that Stigand, and a large party of the Saxon Churchmen, headed this faction.

But the main causes for defection were not in adherence to one chief or to another. They were to be found in selfish inertness, in stubborn conceit, in the long peace, and the enervate superstition which had relaxed the sinews of the old Saxon manhood; in that indifference to things ancient, which contempt for old names and races engendered; that timorous spirit of calculation, which the over-regard for wealth had fostered; which made men averse to leave trade and farm for the perils of the field, and jeopardise their possessions if the foreigner should prevail.

Accustomed already to kings of a foreign race, and having fared well under Canute, there were many who said, "What matters who sits on the throne? the king must be equally bound by our laws." Then too was heard the favourite argument of all slothful minds: "Time enough yet! one battle lost is not England won. Marry, we shall turn out fast eno' if Harold be beaten."

Add to all these causes for apathy and desertion, the haughty jealousies of the several populations not yet wholly fused into one empire. The Northum-

brian Danes, untaught even by their recent escape from the Norwegian, regarded with ungrateful coldness a war limited at present to the southern coasts; and the vast territory under Mercia was, with more excuse, equally supine; while their two young Earls, too new in their command to have much sway with their subject populations, had they been in their capitals, had now arrived in London; and there lingered, making head, doubtless, against the intrigues in favour of the Atheling;—so little had Harold's marriage with Aldyth brought him, at the hour of his dreadest need, the power for which happiness had been resigned!

Nor must we put out of account, in summing the causes which at this awful crisis weakened the arm of England, the curse of slavery amongst the theowes, which left the lowest part of the population wholly without interest in the defense of the land. Too late —too late for all but unavailing slaughter, the spirit of the country rose amidst the violated pledges, but under the iron heel, of the Norman Master! Had that spirit put forth all its might for one day with Harold, where had been the centuries of bondage! Oh, shame to be absent—All blessed those present! There was no hope for England out of the scanty lines of the immortal army encamped on the field of Hastings. There, long on earth, and vain vaunts of poor pride, shall be kept the roll of the robber-invaders. In what roll are *your* names, holy Heroes of the Soil? Yes, may the prayer of the Virgin Queen be registered on high; and assoiled of all sin, O ghosts of the glorious Dead, may ye rise from your graves at the trump of the angel; and your names, lost on earth,

shine radiant and stainless amidst the Hierarchy of Heaven!

Dull came the shades of evening, and pale through the rolling clouds glimmered the rising stars; when, —all prepared, all arrayed,—Harold sat with Haco and Gurth, in his tent; and before them stood a man, half French by origin, who had just returned from the Norman camp.

"So thou didst mingle with the men undiscovered?" said the King.

"No, not undiscovered, my lord. I fell in with a knight, whose name I have since heard as that of Mallet de Graville, who wilily seemed to believe in what I stated, and who gave me meat and drink, with debonair courtesy. Then said he abruptly,—'Spy from Harold, thou hast come to see the strength of the Norman. Thou shalt have thy will—follow me.' Therewith he led me, all startled I own, through the lines; and, O King, I should deem them indeed countless as the sands, and resistless as the waves, but that, strange as it may seem to thee, I saw more monks than warriors."

"How! thou jestest!" said Gurth, surprised.

"No; for thousands by thousands, they were praying and kneeling; and their heads were all shaven with the tonsure of priests."

"Priests are they not," cried Harold, with his calm smile, "but doughty warriors and dauntless knights."

Then he continued his questions to the spy; and his smile vanished at the accounts, not only of the numbers of the force, but their vast provision of missiles, and the almost incredible proportion of their cavalry.

As soon as the spy had been dismissed, the King turned to his kinsmen.

"What think you?" he said; "shall we judge ourselves of the foe? The night will be dark anon —our steeds are fleet—and not shod with iron like the Normans; — the sward noiseless — What think you?"

"A merry conceit," cried the blithe Leofwine. "I should like much to see the boar in his den, ere he taste of my spear-point."

"And I," said Gurth, "do feel so restless a fever in my veins that I would fain cool it by the night air. Let us go: I know all the ways of the country; for hither have I come often with hawk and hound. But let us wait yet till the night is more hushed and deep."

The clouds had gathered over the whole surface of the skies, and there hung sullen; and the mists were cold and grey on the lower grounds, when the four Saxon chiefs set forth on their secret and perilous enterprise.

> "Knights and riders took they none,
> Squires and varlets of foot not one;
> All unarmed of weapon and weed,
> Save the shield, and spear, and the sword at need." [1]

Passing their own sentinels, they entered a wood, Gurth leading the way, and catching glimpses, through the irregular path, of the blazing lights, that shone red over the pause of the Norman war.

[1] "Ne meinent od els chevalier,
Varlet à pie ne eskuier;
Ne nul d'els n'a armes portée,
Forz sol escu, lance, et espée."
Roman de Rou, Second Part, v. 12, 126.

William had moved on his army to within about two miles from the farthest outpost of the Saxon, and contracted his lines into compact space; the reconnoiterers were thus enabled, by the light of the links and watchfires, to form no inaccurate notion of the formidable foe whom the morrow was to meet. The ground[1] on which they stood was high, and in the deep shadow of the wood; with one of the large dykes common to the Saxon boundaries in front, so that, even if discovered, a barrier not easily passed lay between them and the foe.

In regular lines and streets extended huts of branches for the meaner soldiers, leading up, in serried rows but broad vistas, to the tents of the knights, and the gaudier pavilions of the counts and prelates. There, were to be seen the flags of Bretagne and Anjou, of Burgundy, of Flanders, even the ensign of France, which the volunteers from that country had assumed; and right in the midst of this Capital of War, the gorgeous pavilion of William himself, with a dragon of gold before it, surmounting the staff, from which blazed the Papal gonfanon. In every division they heard the anvils of the armourers, the measured tread of the sentries, the neigh and snort of innumerable steeds. And along the lines, between hut and tent, they saw tall shapes passing to and from the forge and smithy, bearing mail, and swords, and shafts. No sound of revel, no laugh of wassail was heard in the consecrated camp; all was astir, but with the grave

[1] "Ke d'une angarde* u ils 'estuient
Cels de l'ost virent, ki pres furent."
Roman de Rou, Second Part, v. 12, 126.

* *Angarde*, eminence.

and earnest preparations of thoughtful men. As the four Saxons halted silent, each might have heard, through the remoter din, the other's painful breathing.

At length, from two tents, placed to the right and left of the Duke's pavilion, there came a sweet tinkling sound, as of deep silver bells. At that note there was an evident and universal commotion throughout the armament. The roar of the hammers ceased; and from every green hut and every grey tent, swarmed the host. Now, rows of living men lined the camp-streets, leaving still a free, though narrow passage in the midst. And, by the blaze of more than a thousand torches, the Saxons saw processions of priests, in their robes and aubes, with censer and rood, coming down the various avenues. As the priests paused, the warriors knelt; and there was a low murmur as if of confession, and the sign of lifted hands, as if in absolution and blessing. Suddenly, from the outskirts of the camp, and full in sight, emerged, from one of the cross lanes, Odo of Bayeux himself, in his white surplice, and the cross in his right hand. Yea, even to the meanest and lowliest soldiers of the armament, whether taken from honest craft and peaceful calling, or the outpourings of Europe's sinks and sewers, catamarans from the Alps, and cut-throats from the Rhine,—yea, even among the vilest and the meanest, came the anointed brother of the great Duke, the haughtiest prelate in Christendom, whose heart even then was fixed on the Pontiff's throne—there he came, to absolve, and to shrive, and to bless. And the red watchfires streamed on his proud face and spotless robes, as the Children of Wrath knelt around the Delegate of Peace.

Harold's hand clenched firm on the arm of Gurth, and his old scorn of the monk broke forth in his bitter smile and his muttered words. But Gurth's face was sad and awed.

And now, as the huts and the canvas thus gave up the living, they could indeed behold the enormous disparity of numbers with which it was their doom to contend, and, over those numbers, that dread intensity of zeal, that sublimity of fanaticism, which from one end of that war-town to the other, consecrated injustice, gave the heroism of the martyr to ambition, and blended the whisper of lusting avarice with the self-applauses of the saint!

Not a word said the four Saxons. But as the priestly procession glided to the farther quarters of the armament, as the soldiers in their neighbourhood disappeared within their lodgments, and the torches moved from them to the more distant vistas of the camp, like lines of retreating stars, Gurth heaved a heavy sigh, and turned his horse's head from the scene.

But scarce had they gained the centre of the wood, than there rose, as from the heart of the armament, a swell of solemn voices. For the night had now come to the third watch,[1] in which, according to the belief of the age, angel and fiend were alike astir, and that church-division of time was marked and hallowed by a monastic hymn.

Inexpressibly grave, solemn, and mournful came the strain through the drooping boughs, and the heavy darkness of the air; and it continued to thrill in the ears of the riders till they had passed the wood, and

[1] Midnight.

the cheerful watchfires from their own heights broke upon them to guide their way. They rode rapidly, but still in silence, past their sentries; and, ascending the slopes, where the force lay thick, how different were the sounds that smote them! Round the large fires the men grouped in great circles, with the ale-horns and flagons passing merrily from hand to hand; shouts of drink-hæl and was-hæl, bursts of gay laughter, snatches of old songs, old as the days of Athelstan,—varying, where the Anglo-Danes lay, into the far more animated and kindling poetry of the Pirate North,—still spoke of the heathen time when War was a joy, and Valhalla was the heaven.

"By my faith," said Leofwine brightening; "these are sounds and sights that do a man's heart good, after those doleful ditties, and the long faces of the shavelings. I vow by St. Alban, that I felt my veins curdling into ice-bolts, when that dirge came through the woodholt. Hollo, Sexwolf, my tall man, lift us up that full horn of thine, and keep thyself within the pins, Master Wassailer; we must have steady feet and cool heads to-morrow."

Sexwolf, who, with a band of Harold's veterans, was at full carousal, started up at the young Earl's greetings, and looked lovingly into his smiling face as he reached him the horn.

"Heed what my brother bids thee, Sexwolf," said Harold severely; "the hands that draw shafts against us to-morrow will not tremble with the night's wassail."

"Nor ours either, my lord the King," said Sexwolf, boldly; "our heads can bear both drink and blows, —and—(sinking his voice into a whisper) the rumour runs that the odds are so against us, that I would not,

for all thy fair brother's earldoms, have our men other than blithe to-night."

Harold answered not, but moved on, and coming then within full sight of the bold Saxons of Kent, the unmixed sons of the Saxon soil, and the special favourers of the House of Godwin, so affectionate, hearty, and cordial was their joyous shout of his name, that he felt his kingly heart leap within him. Dismounting, he entered the circle, and with the august frankness of a noble chief, nobly popular, gave to all cheering smile and animating word. That done, he said more gravely: "In less than an hour, all wassail must cease,—my bodes will come round; and then sound sleep, my brave merry men, and lusty rising with the lark!"

"As you will, as you will, dear our King," cried Vebba, as spokesman for the soldiers. "Fear us not —life and death, we are yours."

"Life and death yours, and freedom's," cried the Kent men.

Coming now towards the royal tent beside the standard, the discipline was more perfect, and the hush decorous. For round that standard were both the special body-guard of the King, and the volunteers from London and Middlesex; men more intelligent than the bulk of the army, and more gravely aware, therefore, of the might of the Norman sword.

Harold entered his tent, and threw himself on his couch, in deep reverie; his brothers and Haco watched him silently. At length, Gurth approached; and, with a reverence rare in the familiar intercourse between the two, knelt at his brother's side, and taking Harold's hand in his, looked him full in the face, his eyes moist with tears, and said thus:

"Oh, Harold! never prayer have I asked of thee, that thou hast not granted: grant me this! sorest of all, it may be, to grant, but most fitting of all for me to press. Think not, O beloved brother, O honoured King, think not that it is with slighting reverence, that I lay rough hand on the wound deepest at thy heart. But, however surprised or compelled, sure it is that thou didst make oath to William, and upon the relics of saints; avoid this battle, for I see that thought is now within thy soul; that thought haunted thee in the words of the monk to-day; in the sight of that awful camp to-night;—avoid this battle! and do not thyself stand in arms against the man to whom the oath was pledged!"

"Gurth, Gurth!" exclaimed Harold, pale and writhing.

"We," continued his brother, "we at least have taken no oath, no perjury is charged against us; vainly the thunders of the Vatican are launched on our heads. Our war is just: we but defend our country. Leave us, then, to fight to-morrow; thou retire towards London and raise fresh armies; if we win, the danger is past; if we lose, thou wilt avenge us. And England is not lost while thou survivest."

"Gurth, Gurth!" again exclaimed Harold, in a voice piercing in its pathos of reproach.

"Gurth counsels well," said Haco, abruptly; "there can be no doubt of the wisdom of his words. Let the King's kinsmen lead the troops; let the King himself with his guard hasten to London and ravage and lay waste the country as he retreats by the way;[1] so

[1] This counsel the Norman chronicler ascribes to Gurth, but it is so at variance with the character of that hero, that it is here assigned to the unscrupulous intellect of Haco.

that even if William beat us, all supplies will fail him; he will be in a land without forage, and victory here will aid him nought; for you, my liege, will have a force equal to his own, ere he can march to the gates of London."

"Faith and troth, the young Haco speaks like a greybeard; he hath not lived in Rouen for nought," quoth Leofwine. "Hear him, my Harold, and leave us to shave the Normans yet more closely than the barber hath already shorn."

Harold turned ear and eye to each of the speakers, and, as Leofwine closed, he smiled.

"Ye have chid me well, kinsmen, for a thought that had entered into my mind ere ye spake—"

Gurth interrupted the King, and said anxiously:

"To retreat with the whole army upon London, and refuse to meet the Norman till with numbers more fairly matched!"

"That had been my thought," said Harold, surprised.

"Such for a moment, too, was mine," said Gurth, sadly; "but it is too late. Such a measure, now, would have all the disgrace of flight, and bring none of the profits of retreat. The ban of the Church would get wind; our priests, awed and alarmed, might wield it against us; the whole population would be damped and disheartened; rivals to the crown might start up; the realm be divided. No, it is impossible!"

"Impossible," said Harold, calmly. "And if the army cannot retreat, of all men to stand firm, surely it is the captain and the King. *I*, Gurth, leave others to dare the fate from which I fly! *I* give weight to the impious curse of the Pope, by shrinking from its

idle blast! *I* confirm and ratify the oath, from which all law must absolve me, by forsaking the cause of the land, which I purify myself when I guard! *I* leave to others the agony of the martyrdom or the glory of the conquest! Gurth, thou art more cruel than the Norman! And I, son of Sweyn, *I* ravage the land committed to my charge, and despoil the fields which I cannot keep! Oh, Haco, that indeed were to be the traitor and the recreant! No, whatever the sin of my oath, never will I believe that Heaven can punish millions for the error of one man. Let the bones of the dead war against us; in life, they were men like ourselves, and no saints in the calendar so holy as the freemen who fight for their hearths and their altars. Nor do I see aught to alarm us even in these grave human odds. We have but to keep fast these entrenchments; preserve, man by man, our invincible line; and the waves will but split on our rock: ere the sun set to-morrow, we shall see the tide ebb, leaving, as waifs, but the dead of the baffled invader.

"Fare ye well, loving kinsmen; kiss me, my brothers; kiss me on the cheek, my Haco. Go now to your tents. Sleep in peace and wake with the trumpet to the gladness of noble war!"

Slowly the Earls left the King; slowest of all the lingering Gurth; and when all were gone, and Harold was alone, he threw round a rapid, troubled glance, and then, hurrying to the simple imageless crucifix that stood on its pedestal at the farther end of the tent, he fell on his knees, and faltered out, while his breast heaved, and his frame shook with the travail of his passion:

"If my sin be beyond a pardon, my oath without

recall, on me, on me, O Lord of Hosts, on me alone the doom. Not on them, not on them—not on England!"

CHAPTER VII

On the fourteenth of October, 1066, the day of St. Calixtus, the Norman force was drawn out in battle array. Mass had been said; Odo and the Bishop of Coutance had blessed the troops; and received their vow never more to eat flesh on the anniversary of that day. And Odo had mounted his snow-white charger, and already drawn up the cavalry against the coming of his brother the Duke. The army was marshalled in three great divisions.

Roger de Montgommeri and William Fitzosborne led the first; and with them were the forces from Picardy and the countship of Boulogne, and the fiery Franks; Geoffric Martel and the German Hugues (a prince of fame); Aimeri, Lord of Thouars, and the sons of Alain Fergant, Duke of Bretagne, led the second, which comprised the main bulk of the allies from Bretagne, and Maine, and Poitou. But both these divisions were intermixed with Normans, under their own special Norman chiefs.

The third section embraced the flower of martial Europe, the most renowned of the Norman race; whether those knights bore the French titles into which their ancestral Scandinavian names had been transformed—Sires of Beaufou and Harcourt, Abbeville, and de Molun, Montfichet, Grantmesnil, Lacie, D'Aincourt, and D'Asnieres;—or whether, still preserving, amidst their daintier titles, the old names

that had scattered dismay through the seas of the Baltic; Osborne and Tonstain, Mallet and Bulver, Brand and Bruse.[1] And over this division presided Duke William. Here was the main body of the matchless cavalry, to which, however, orders were given to support either of the other sections, as need might demand. And with this body were also the reserve. For it is curious to notice, that William's strategy resembled in much that of the last great Invader of Nations—relying first upon the effect of the charge; secondly, upon a vast reserve brought to bear at the exact moment on the weakest point of the foe.

All the horsemen were in complete link or net mail,[2] armed with spears and strong swords, and long, pear-shaped shields, with the device either of a cross or a dragon.[3] The archers, on whom William greatly relied, were numerous in all three of the corps,[4] were armed more lightly—helms on their heads, but with leather or quilted breastplates, and "panels," or gaiters, for the lower limbs.

[1] Osborne—(Asbiorn),—one of the most common of Danish and Norwegian names. Tonstain, Toustain, or Tostain, the same as Tosti, or Tostig,—Danish. (Harold's brother is called Tostain or Toustain, in the Norman chronicles.) Brand, a name common to Dane or Norwegian—Bulmer is a Norwegian name, and so is Bulver or Bolvär—which is, indeed, so purely Scandinavian that it is one of the warlike names given to Odin himself by the Norse-scalds. Bulverhithe still commemorates the landing of a Norwegian son of the war-god. Bruce, the ancestor of the deathless Scot, also bears in that name, more illustrious than all, the proof of his Scandinavian birth.

[2] This mail appears in that age to have been sewn upon linen or cloth. In the later age of the crusaders, it was more artful, and the links supported each other, without being attached to any other material.

[3] Bayeux tapestry.

[4] The cross-bow is not to be seen in the Bayeux tapestry—the Norman bows are not long.

But before the chiefs and captains rode to their several posts they assembled round William, whom Fitzosborne had called betimes, and who had not yet endued his heavy mail, that all men might see suspended from his throat certain relics chosen out of those on which Harold had pledged his fatal oath. Standing on an eminence in front of all his lines, the consecrated banner behind him, and Bayard, his Spanish destrier, held by his squires at his side, the Duke conversed cheerily with his barons, often pointing to the relics. Then, in sight of all, he put on his mail, and, by the haste of his squires, the back-piece was presented to him first. The superstitious Normans recoiled as at an evil omen.

"Tut!" said the ready chief; "not in omens and divinations, but in God, trust I! Yet, good omen indeed is this, and one that may give heart to the most doubtful; for it betokens that the last shall be first—the dukedom a kingdom—the count a king! Ho there, Rou de Terni, as Hereditary Standard-bearer take thy right, and hold fast to yon holy gonfanon."

"*Grant merci*," said De Terni, "not to-day shall a standard be borne by me, for I shall have need of my right arm for my sword, and my left for my charger's rein and my trusty shield."

"Thou sayest right, and we can ill spare such a warrior. Gautier Giffart, Sire de Longueville, to thee is the gonfanon."

"*Beau Sire*," answered Gautier; "*par Dex, Merci*. But my head is grey and my arm weak; and the little strength left me I would spend in smiting the English at the head of my men."

"*Per la resplendar Dé*," cried William, frowning;

—"do ye think, my proud vavasours, to fail me in this great need?"

"Nay," said Gautier; "but I have a great host of chevaliers and paid soldiers, and without the old man at their head will they fight as well?"

"Then, approach thou, Tonstain le Blanc, son of Rou," said William; "and be thine the charge of a standard that shall wave ere nightfall over the brows of thy—*King!*" A young knight, tall and strong as his Danish ancestor, stept forth, and laid gripe on the banner.

Then William, now completely armed, save his helmet, sprang at one bound on his steed. A shout of admiration rang from the Quens and knights.

"Saw ye ever such *beau rei?*"[1] said the Vicomte de Thouars.

The shout was caught by the lines, and echoed afar, wide, and deep through the armament, as in all his singular majesty of brow and mien, William rode forth: lifting his hand, the shout hushed, and thus he spoke "loud as a trumpet with a silver sound."

"Normans and soldiers, long renowned in the lips of men, and now hallowed by the blessing of the Church!—I have not brought you over the wide seas for my cause alone; what I gain, ye gain. If I take the land, you will share it. Fight your best, and spare not; no retreat, and no quarter! I am not come here for my cause alone, but to avenge our whole nation for the felonies of yonder English. They butchered our kinsmen the Danes, on the night of St. Brice; they murdered Alfred, the brother of their last King, and decimated the Normans who were with him. Yonder

[1] Roman de Rou.

they stand,—malefactors that await their doom! and ye the doomsmen! Never, even in a good cause, were yon English illustrious for warlike temper and martial glory.[1] Remember how easily the Danes subdued them! Are ye less than Danes, or I than Canute? By victory ye obtain vengeance, glory, honours, lands, spoil,—aye, spoil beyond your wildest dreams. By defeat,—yea, even but by loss of ground, ye are given up to the sword! Escape there is not, for the ships are useless. Before you the foe, behind you the ocean. Normans, remember the feats of your countrymen in Sicily! Behold a Sicily more rich! Lordships and lands to the living,—glory and salvation to those who die under the gonfanon of the Church! On, to the cry of the Norman warrior; the cry before which have fled so often the prowest Paladins of Burgundy and France—'*Notre Dame et Dex aide!*'"[2]

Meanwhile, no less vigilant, and in his own strategy no less skilful, Harold had marshalled his men. He formed two divisions; those in front of the entrenchments; those within it. At the first, the men of Kent, as from time immemorial, claimed the honour of the van, under "the Pale Charger,"—famous banner of Hengist. This force was drawn up in the form of the Anglo-Danish wedge; the foremost lines in the triangle all in heavy mail, armed with their great axes, and covered by their immense shields. Behind these lines, in the interior of the wedge, were the archers, protected by the front rows of the heavy armed; while the few horsemen—few indeed compared with the Norman cavalry—were artfully disposed where they could

[1] William of Poitiers. [2] *Dieu nous aide.*

best harass and distract the formidable chivalry with which they were instructed to skirmish, and not peril actual encounter. Other bodies of the light armed; slingers, javelin throwers, and archers, were planted in spots carefully selected, according as they were protected by trees, bushwood, and dykes. The Northumbrians (that is, all the warlike population, north the Humber, including Yorkshire, Westmoreland, Cumberland, &c.), were, for their present shame and future ruin, absent from that field, save, indeed, a few who had joined Harold in his march to London. But there were the mixed races of Hertfordshire and Essex, with the pure Saxons of Sussex and Surrey, and a large body of the sturdy Anglo-Danes from Lincolnshire, Ely and Norfolk. Men, too, there were, half of old British blood, from Dorset, Somerset, and Gloucester.

And all were marshalled according to those touching and pathetic tactics which speak of a nation more accustomed to defend than to aggrieve. To that field the head of each family led his sons and kinsfolk; every ten families (or tything) were united under their own chosen captain. Every ten of these tythings had, again, some loftier chief, dear to the populace in peace; and so on the holy circle spread from household, hamlet, town,—till, all combined, as one county under one Earl, the warriors fought under the eyes of their own kinsfolk, friends, neighbours, chosen chiefs! What wonder that they were brave?

The second division comprised Harold's housecarles, or bodyguard,—the veterans especially attached to his family,—the companions of his successful wars, —a select band of the martial East-Anglians,—the soldiers supplied by London and Middlesex, and who,

both in arms, discipline, martial temper and athletic habits, ranked high among the most stalwart of the troops, mixed, as their descent was, from the warlike Dane and the sturdy Saxon. In this division, too, was comprised the reserve. And it was all encompassed by the palisades and breastworks, to which were but three sorties, whence the defenders might sally, or through which at need the vanguard might secure a retreat. All the heavy armed had mail and shields similar to the Normans, though somewhat less heavy; the light armed had, some tunics of quilted linen, some of hide; helmets of the last material, spears, javelins, swords, and clubs. But the main arm of the host was in the great shield, and the great axe wielded by men larger in stature and stronger of muscle than the majority of the Normans, whose physical race had deteriorated partly by inter-marriage with the more delicate Frank, partly by the haughty disdain of foot exercise.

Mounting a swift and light steed, intended not for encounter (for it was the custom of English kings to fight on foot, in token that where they fought there was no retreat), but to bear the rider rapidly from line to line,[1] King Harold rode to the front of the vanguard;—his brothers by his side. His head, like his great foe's, was bare, nor could there be a more striking contrast than that of the broad unwrinkled brow of the Saxon, with his fair locks, the sign of royalty and freedom, parted and falling over the collar of mail, the clear and steadfast eye of blue, the cheek somewhat hollowed by kingly cares, but flushed now with

[1] Thus, when at the battle of Barnet, Earl Warwick, the king-maker, slew his horse and fought on foot, he followed the old traditional customs of Saxon chiefs.

manly pride—the form stalwart and erect, but spare in its graceful symmetry, and void of all that theatric pomp of bearing which was assumed by William—no greater contrast could there be than that which the simple earnest Hero-king presented, to the brow furrowed with harsh ire and politic wile, the shaven hair of monastic affectation, the dark, sparkling tiger eye, and the vast proportions that awed the gaze in the port and form of the imperious Norman. Deep and loud and hearty as the shout with which his armaments had welcomed William, was that which now greeted the King of the English host: and clear and full, and practised in the storm of popular assemblies, went his voice down the listening lines.

"This day, O friends and Englishmen, sons of our common land—this day ye fight for liberty. The Count of the Normans hath, I know, a mighty army; I disguise not its strength. That army he hath collected together, by promising to each man a share in the spoils of England. Already, in his court and his camp, he hath parcelled out the lands of this kingdom; and fierce are the robbers who fight for the hope of plunder! But he cannot offer to his greatest chief boons nobler than those I offer to my meanest freeman —liberty, and right, and law, in the soil of his fathers! Ye have heard of the miseries endured in the old time under the Dane, but they were slight indeed to those which ye may expect from the Norman. The Dane was kindred to us in language and in law, and who now can tell Saxon from Dane? But yon men would rule ye in a language ye know not, by a law that claims the crown as the right of the sword, and divides the land among the hirelings of an army. We baptised the Dane, and the Church tamed his fierce

soul into peace; but yon men make the Church itself their ally, and march to carnage under the banner profaned to the foulest of human wrongs! Outscourings of all nations, they come against you: Ye fight as brothers under the eyes of your fathers and chosen chiefs; ye fight for the women ye would save from the ravisher; ye fight for the children ye would guard from eternal bondage; ye fight for the altars which yon banner now darkens! Foreign priest is a tyrant as ruthless and stern as ye shall find foreign baron and king! Let no man dream of retreat; every inch of ground that ye yield is the soil of your native land. For me, on this field I peril all. Think that mine eye is upon you wherever ye are. If a line waver or shrink, ye shall hear in the midst the voice of your King. Hold fast to your ranks, remember, such amongst you as fought with me against Hardrada,—remember that it was not till the Norsemen lost, by rash sallies, their serried array, that our arms prevailed against them. Be warned by their fatal error, break not the form of the battle; and I tell you on the faith of a soldier who never yet hath left field without victory,—that ye cannot be beaten. While I speak, the winds swell the sails of the Norse ships, bearing home the corpse of Hardrada. Accomplish this day the last triumph of England; add to these hills a new mount of the conquered dead! And when, in far times and strange lands, scald and scop shall praise the brave man for some valiant deed wrought in some holy cause, they shall say, 'He was brave as those who fought by the side of Harold, and swept from the sward of England the hosts of the haughty Norman.'"

Scarcely had the rapturous hurrahs of the Saxons

closed on this speech, when full in sight, north-west of Hastings, came the first division of the Invader.

Harold remained gazing at them, and not seeing the other sections in movement, said to Gurth, "If these are all that they venture out, the day is ours."

"Look yonder!" said the sombre Haco, and he pointed to the long array that now gleamed from the wood through which the Saxon kinsmen had passed the night before; and scarcely were these cohorts in view, than lo! from a third quarter advanced the glittering knighthood under the Duke. All three divisions came on in simultaneous assault, two on either wing of the Saxon vanguard, the third (the Norman) towards the entrenchments.

In the midst of the Duke's cohort was the sacred gonfanon, and in front of it and of the whole line, rode a strange warrior of gigantic height. And as he rode, the warrior sang:

> "Chaunting loud the lusty strain
> Of Roland and of Charlemain,
> And the dead, who, deathless all,
> Fell at famous Roncesval." [1]

And the knights, no longer singing hymn and litany, swelled, hoarse through their helmets, the martial chorus. This warrior, in front of the Duke and the

[1] "Devant li Dus alout cantant
De Karlemaine è de Rollant,
Ed 'Olever e des Vassalls
Ki morurent en Ronchevals."
Roman de Rou, Part ii. l. 13,151.

Much research has been made by French antiquaries, to discover the old Chant de Roland, but in vain.

horsemen, seemed beside himself with the joy of battle. As he rode, and as he chaunted, he threw up his sword in the air like a gleeman, catching it nimbly as it fell,[1] and flourishing it wildly, till, as if unable to restrain his fierce exhilaration, he fairly put spurs to his horse, and, dashing forward to the very front of a detachment of Saxon riders, shouted:

"A Taillefer! a Taillefer!" and by voice and gesture challenged forth some one to single combat.

A fiery young thegn who knew the Romance tongue, started forth and crossed swords with the poet; but by what seemed rather a juggler's sleight of hand than a knight's fair fence, Taillefer, again throwing up and catching his sword with incredible rapidity, shore the unhappy Saxon from the helm to the chine, and riding over his corpse, shouting and laughing, he again renewed his challenge. A second rode forth and shared the same fate. The rest of the English horsemen stared at each other aghast; the shouting, singing, juggling giant seemed to them not knight, but demon; and that single incident, preliminary to all other battle, in sight of the whole field, might have sufficed to damp the ardour of the English, had not Leofwine, who had been despatched by the King with a message to the entrenchments, come in front of the detachment; and, his gay spirit roused and stung by the insolence of the Norman, and the evident dismay of the Saxon riders, without thought of his graver duties, he spurred his light half-mailed steed to the Norman giant; and, not even drawing his sword, but with his spear raised over his head, and his form covered by his shield, he cried in Romance tongue, "Go

[1] W. Pict. *Chron. de Nor.*

and chaunt to the foul fiend, O croaking minstrel!" Taillefer rushed forward, his sword shivered on the Saxon shield, and in the same moment he fell a corpse under the hoofs of his steed, transfixed by the Saxon spear.

A cry of woe, in which even William (who, proud of his poet's achievements, had pressed to the foremost line to see this new encounter) joined his deep voice, wailed through the Norman ranks; while Leofwine rode deliberately towards them, halted a moment, and then flung his spear in the midst with so deadly an aim, that a young knight, within two of William, reeled on his saddle, groaned, and fell.

"How like ye, O Normans, the Saxon gleemen?" said Leofwine, as he turned slowly, regained the detachment, and bade them heed carefully the orders they had received, viz., to avoid the direct charge of the Norman horse, but to take every occasion to harass and divert the stragglers; and then blithely singing a Saxon stave, as if inspired by Norman minstrelsy, he rode into the entrenchments.

CHAPTER VIII

The two brethren of Waltham, Osgood and Ailred, had arrived a little after daybreak at the spot in which, about half a mile to the rear of Harold's palisades, the beasts of burden that had borne the heavy arms, missiles, luggage, and forage of the Saxon march, were placed in and about the fenced yards of a farm. And many human beings, of both sexes and various ranks, were there assembled, some in breathless expectation, some in careless talk, some in fervent prayer.

The master of the farm, his sons, and the able-bodied ceorls in his employ, had joined the forces of the King, under Gurth, as Earl of the county.[1] But many aged theowes, past military service, and young children, grouped around: the first, stolid and indifferent—the last, prattling, curious, lively, gay. There, too, were the wives of some of the soldiers, who, as common in Saxon expeditions, had followed their husbands to the field; and there, too, were the ladies of many a Hlaford in the neighbouring district, who, no less true to their mates than the wives of humbler men, were drawn by their English hearts to the fatal spot. A small wooden chapel, half decayed, stood a little behind, with its doors wide open, a sanctuary in case of need; and the interior was thronged with kneeling suppliants.

The two monks joined, with pious gladness, some of their sacred calling, who were leaning over the low wall, and straining their eyes towards the bristling field. A little apart from them, and from all, stood a female; the hood drawn over her face, silent in her unknown thoughts.

By and by, as the march of the Norman multitude sounded hollow, and the trumps, and the fifes, and the shouts, rolled on through the air, in many a stormy peal,—the two abbots in the Saxon camp, with their attendant monks, came riding towards the farm from the entrenchments.

The groups gathered round these new comers in haste and eagerness.

[1] For, as Sir F. Palgrave shrewdly conjectures, upon the dismemberment of the vast earldom of Wessex, on Harold's accession to the throne, that portion of it comprising Sussex (the old government of his grandfather Wolnoth) seems to have been assigned to Gurth.

"The battle hath begun," said the Abbot of Hide, gravely. "Pray God for England, for never was its people in peril so great from man."

The female started and shuddered at those words.

"And the King, the King," she cried, in a sudden and thrilling voice; "where is he?—the King?"

"Daughter," said the abbot, "the King's post is by his standard; but I left him in the van of his troops. Where he may be now I know not. Wherever the foe presses sorest."

Then dismounting, the abbots entered the yard, to be accosted instantly by all the wives, who deemed, poor souls, that the holy men must, throughout all the field, have seen *their* lords; for each felt as if God's world hung but on the single life in which each pale trembler lived.

With all their faults of ignorance and superstition, the Saxon churchmen loved their flocks; and the good abbots gave what comfort was in their power, and then passed into the chapel, where all who could find room followed them.

The war now raged.

The two divisions of the invading army that included the auxiliaries had sought in vain to surround the English vanguard, and take it in the rear: that noble phalanx had no rear. Deepest and strongest at the base of the triangle, everywhere front opposed the foe; shields formed a rampart against the dart—spears a palisade against the horse. While that vanguard maintained its ground, William could not pierce to the entrenchments, the strength of which, however, he was enabled to perceive. He now changed his tactics, joined his knighthood to the other sections, threw his

hosts rapidly into many wings, and leaving broad spaces between his archers—who continued their fiery hail—ordered his heavy-armed foot to advance on all sides upon the wedge, and break its ranks for the awaiting charge of his horse.

Harold, still in the centre of the vanguard, amidst the men of Kent, continued to animate them all with voice and hand; and, as the Normans now closed in, he flung himself from his steed, and strode on foot, with his mighty battle-axe, to the spot where the rush was dreadest.

Now came the shock—the fight hand-to-hand: spear and lance were thrown aside, axe and sword rose and shore. But before the close-serried lines of the English, with their physical strength and veteran practice in their own special arm, the Norman foot were mowed as by the scythe. In vain, in the intervals, thundered the repeated charges of the fiery knights; in vain, throughout all, came the shaft and the bolt.

Animated by the presence of their King fighting amongst them as a simple soldier, but with his eye ever quick to foresee, his voice ever prompt to warn, the men of Kent swerved not a foot from their indomitable ranks. The Norman infantry wavered and gave way; on, step by step, still unbroken in array, pressed the English. And their cry, "Out! out! Holy Crosse!" rose high above the flagging sound of "Ha Rou! Ha Rou!—Notre Dame!"

"*Per la resplendar Dé*," cried William. "Our soldiers are but women in the garb of Normans. Ho, spears to the rescue! With me to the charge, Sires D'Aumale and De Littain—with me, gallant Bruse, and De Mortain; with me, De Graville and Grantmes-

nil—Dex aide! Notre Dame." And heading his prowest knights, William came, as a thunderbolt, on the bills and shields. Harold, who scarce a minute before had been in a remoter rank, was already at the brunt of that charge. At his word down knelt the foremost line, leaving nought but their shields and their spear-points against the horse. While behind them, the axe in both hands, bent forward the soldiery in the second rank, to smite and to crush. And, from the core of the wedge, poured the shafts of the archers. Down rolled in the dust half the charge of those knights. Bruse reeled on his saddle; the dread right hand of D'Aumale fell lopped by the axe; De Graville, hurled from his horse, rolled at the feet of Harold; and William, borne by his great steed and his colossal strength into the third rank—there dealt, right and left, the fierce strokes of his iron club, till he felt his horse sinking under him—and had scarcely time to back from the foe—scarcely time to get beyond reach of their weapons, ere the Spanish destrier, frightfully gashed through its strong mail, fell dead on the plain. His knights swept round him. Twenty barons leapt from selle to yield him their chargers. He chose the one nearest to hand, sprang to foot and to stirrup, and rode back to his lines. Meanwhile De Graville's casque, its strings broken by the shock, had fallen off, and as Harold was about to strike, he recognised his guest.

Holding up his hand to keep off the press of his men, the generous King said briefly: "Rise and retreat!—no time on this field for captor and captive. He whom thou hast called recreant knight, has been Saxon host. Thou hast fought by his side, thou shalt not die by his hand!—Go."

Not a word spoke De Graville; but his dark eye dwelt one minute with mingled pity and reverence on the King; then rising, he turned away; and slowly, as if he disdained to fly, strode back over the corpses of his countrymen.

"Stay, all hands!" cried the King to his archers; "yon man hath tasted our salt, and done us good service of old. He hath paid his weregeld."

Not a shaft was discharged.

Meanwhile, the Norman infantry, who had been before recoiling, no sooner saw their Duke (whom they recognised by his steed and equipment) fall on the ground, than, setting up a shout—"The Duke is dead!" they fairly turned round, and fled fast in disorder.

The fortune of the day was now well-nigh turned in favour of the Saxons; and the confusion of the Normans, as the cry of "The Duke is dead!" reached, and circled round, the host, would have been irrecoverable, had Harold possessed a cavalry fit to press the advantage gained, or had not William himself rushed into the midst of the fugitives, throwing his helmet back on his neck, showing his face, all animated with fierce valour and disdainful wrath, while he cried aloud:

"I live, ye varlets! Behold the face of a chief who never yet forgave coward! Ay, tremble more at me than at yon English, doomed and accursed as they be! Ye Normans, ye! I blush for you!" and striking the foremost in the retreat with the flat of his sword, chiding, stimulating, threatening, promising in a breath, he succeeded in staying the flight, reforming the lines, and dispelling the general panic. Then, as he joined his own chosen knights, and surveyed the

field, he beheld an opening which the advanced position of the Saxon vanguard had left, and by which his knights might gain the entrenchments. He mused a moment, his face still bare, and brightening, as he mused. Looking round him, he saw Mallet de Graville, who had remounted, and said, shortly:

"*Pardex*, dear knight, we thought you already with St. Michael!—joy, that you live yet to be an English earl. Look you, ride to Fitzosborne with the signal-word, '*Li Hardiz passent avant!*' Off, and quick."

De Graville bowed, and darted across the plain.

"Now, my Quens and chevaliers," said William, gaily, as he closed his helmet, and took from his squire another spear; "now, I shall give ye the day's great pastime. Pass the word, Sire de Tancarville, to every horseman—Charge!—to the Standard!"

The word passed, the steeds bounded, and the whole force of William's knighthood, scouring the plain to the rear of the Saxon vanguard, made for the entrenchments.

At that sight, Harold, divining the object, and seeing this new and more urgent demand on his presence, halted the battalions over which he had presided, and, yielding the command to Leofwine, once more briefly but strenuously enjoined the troops to heed well their leaders, and on no account to break the wedge, in the form of which lay their whole strength, both against the cavalry and the greater number of the foe. Then mounting his horse, and attended only by Haco, he spurred across the plain, in the opposite direction to that taken by the Normans. In doing so, he was forced to make a considerable circuit towards the rear of the entrenchment,

and the farm, with its watchful groups, came in sight. He distinguished the garbs of the women, and Haco said to him,—

"There wait the wives, to welcome the living victors."

"Or search their lords among the dead!" answered Harold. "Who, Haco, if we fall, will search for us?"

As the word left his lips, he saw, under a lonely thorn-tree, and scarce out of bowshot from the entrenchments, a woman seated. The King looked hard at the bended, hooded form.

"Poor wretch!" he murmured, "her heart is in the battle!" And he shouted aloud, "Farther off! farther off!—the war rushes hitherward!"

At the sound of that voice the woman rose, stretched her arms, and sprang forward. But the Saxon chiefs had already turned their faces towards the neighbouring ingress into the ramparts, and beheld not her movement, while the tramp of rushing chargers, the shout and the roar of clashing war, drowned the wail of her feeble cry:

"I have heard him again, again!" murmured the woman, "God be praised!" and she re-seated herself quietly under the lonely thorn.

As Harold and Haco sprang to their feet within the entrenchments, the shout of "the King—the King!—Holy Crosse!" came in time to rally the force at the farther end, now undergoing the full storm of the Norman chivalry.

The willow ramparts were already rent and hewed beneath the hoofs of horses and the clash of swords; and the sharp points on the frontals of the Norman destriers were already gleaming within the entrench-

ments, when Harold arrived at the brunt of action. The tide was then turned; not one of those rash riders left the entrenchments they had gained; steel and horse alike went down beneath the ponderous battle-axes; and William, again foiled and baffled, drew off his cavalry with the reluctant conviction that those breastworks, so manned, were not to be won by horse. Slowly the knights retreated down the slope of the hillock, and the English, animated by that sight, would have left their stronghold to pursue, but for the warning cry of Harold. The interval in the strife thus gained was promptly and vigorously employed in repairing the palisades. And this done, Harold, turning to Haco, and the thegns round him, said joyously:

"By Heaven's help we shall yet win this day. And know you not that it is my fortunate day—the day on which, hitherto, all hath prospered with me, in peace and in war—the day of my birth?"

"Of your birth!" echoed Haco in surprise.

"Ay—did you not know it?"

"Nay!—strange!—it is also the birthday of Duke William! What would astrologers say to the meeting of such stars?" [1]

Harold's cheek paled, but his helmet concealed the paleness:—his arm drooped. The strange dream of his youth again came distinct before him, as it had come in the hall of the Norman at the sight of the ghastly relics;—again he saw the shadowy hand from the cloud—again heard the voice murmuring: "Lo, the star that shone on the birth of the victor;" again

[1] Harold's birthday was certainly the 14th of October. According to Mr. Roscoe, in his "Life of William the Conqueror," William was born also on the 14th of October.

he heard the words of Hilda interpreting the dream —again the chaunt which the dead or the fiend had poured from the rigid lips of the Vala. It boomed on his ear; hollow as a death bell it knelled through the roar of battle—

> "Never
> Crown and brow shall Force dissever,
> Till the dead men, unforgiving,
> Loose the war-steeds on the living;
> Till a sun whose race is ending
> Sees the rival stars contending,
> Where the dead men, unforgiving,
> Wheel their war-steeds round the living!"

Faded the vision, and died the chaunt, as a breath that dims, and vanishes from, the mirror of steel. The breath was gone—the firm steel was bright once more; and suddenly the King was recalled to the sense of the present hour, by shouts and cries, in which the yell of Norman triumph predominated, at the further end of the field. The signal words to Fitzosborne had conveyed to that chief the order for the mock charge on the Saxon vanguard, to be followed by the feigned flight; and so artfully had this stratagem been practised, that despite all the solemn orders of Harold, despite even the warning cry of Leofwine, who, rash and gay-hearted though he was, had yet a captain's skill—the bold English, their blood heated by long contest and seeming victory, could not resist pursuit. They rushed forward impetuously, breaking the order of their hitherto indomitable phalanx, and the more eagerly because the Normans had unwittingly taken their way towards a part of the ground concealing dykes and ditches, into which the English trusted to precipitate the foe. It was as William's

knights retreated from the breastworks that this fatal error was committed: and pointing toward the disordered Saxons with a wild laugh of revengeful joy, William set spurs to his horse, and, followed by all his chivalry, joined the cavalry of Poitou and Boulogne in their swoop upon the scattered array. Already the Norman infantry had turned round — already the horses, that lay in ambush amongst the brushwood near the dykes, had thundered forth. The whole of the late impregnable vanguard was broken up, divided corps from corps,—hemmed in; horse after horse charging to the rear, to the front, to the flank, to the right, to the left.

Gurth, with the men of Surrey and Sussex, had alone kept their ground, but they were now compelled to advance to the aid of their scattered comrades; and coming up in close order, they not only awhile stayed the slaughter, but again half turned the day. Knowing the country thoroughly, Gurth lured the foe into the ditches concealed within a hundred yards of their own ambush, and there the havoc of the foreigners was so great, that the hollows are said to have been literally made level with the plain by their corpses. Yet this combat, however fierce, and however skill might seek to repair the former error, could not be long maintained against such disparity of numbers. And meanwhile, the whole of the division under Geoffroi Martel, and his co-captains, had by a fresh order of William's occupied the space between the entrenchments and the more distant engagement; thus when Harold looked up, he saw the foot of the hillocks so lined with steel, as to render it hopeless that he himself could win to the aid of his vanguard. He set his teeth firmly, looked on, and only by gesture and

smothered exclamations showed his emotions of hope and fear. At length he cried:

"Gallant Gurth! brave Leofwine, look to their pennons; right, right; well fought, sturdy Vebba! Ha! they are moving this way. The wedge cleaves on—it cuts its path through the heart of the foe." And indeed, the chiefs now drawing off the shattered remains of their countrymen, still disunited, but still each section shaping itself wedge-like,—on came the English, with their shields over their head, through the tempest of missiles, against the rush of the steeds, here and there, through the plains, up the slopes, towards the entrenchment, in the teeth of the formidable array of Martel, and harassed behind by hosts that seemed numberless. The King could restrain himself no longer. He selected five hundred of his bravest and most practised veterans, yet comparatively fresh, and commanding the rest to stay firm, descended the hills, and charged unexpectedly into the rear of the mingled Normans and Bretons.

This sortie, well-timed though desperate, served to cover and favour the retreat of the straggling Saxons. Many, indeed, were cut off, but Gurth, Leofwine, and Vebba hewed the way for their followers to the side of Harold, and entered the entrenchments, close followed by the nearer foe, who were again repulsed amidst the shouts of the English.

But, alas! small indeed the band thus saved, and hopeless the thought that the small detachments of English still surviving and scattered over the plain, would ever win to their aid.

Yet in those scattered remnants were, perhaps, almost the only men who, availing themselves of their acquaintance with the country, and despairing of vic-

tory, escaped by flight from the Field of Sanguelac. Nevertheless, within the entrenchments not a man had lost heart; the day was already far advanced, no impression had been yet made on the outworks, the position seemed as impregnable as a fortress of stone; and, truth to say, even the bravest Normans were disheartened, when they looked to that eminence which had foiled the charge of William himself. The Duke, in the recent *mêlée*, had received more than one wound, his third horse that day had been slain under him. The slaughter among the knights and nobles had been immense, for they had exposed their persons with the most desperate valour. And William, after surveying the rout of nearly one half of the English army, heard everywhere, to his wrath and his shame, murmurs of discontent and dismay at the prospect of scaling the heights, in which the gallant remnant had found their refuge. At this critical juncture, Odo of Bayeux, who had hitherto remained in the rear,[1] with the crowds of monks that accompanied the armament, rode into the full field, where all the hosts were re-forming their lines. He was in complete mail, but a white surplice was drawn over the steel, his head was bare, and in his right hand he bore the crozier. A formidable club swung by a leathern noose from his wrist, to be used only for self-defence: the canons forbade the priest to strike merely in assault.

Behind the milk-white steed of Odo came the whole body of reserve, fresh and unbreathed, free from the terrors of their comrades, and stung into proud wrath at the delay of the Norman conquest.

[1] William Pict.

"How now—how now!" cried the prelate; "do ye flag? do ye falter when the sheaves are down, and ye have but to gather up the harvest? How now, sons of the Church! warriors of the Cross! avengers of the Saints! Desert your Count, if ye please; but shrink not back from a lord mightier than man. Lo, I come forth, to ride side by side with my brother, bare-headed, the crozier in my hand. He who fails his liege is but a coward—he who fails the Church is apostate!"

The fierce shout of the reserve closed this harangue, and the words of the prelate, as well as the physical aid he brought to back them, renerved the army. And now the whole of William's mighty host, covering the field, till its lines seemed to blend with the grey horizon, came on serried, steadied, orderly—to all sides of the entrenchment. Aware of the inutility of his horse, till the breastworks were cleared, William placed in the van all his heavy armed foot, spearmen, and archers, to open the way through the palisades, the sorties from which had now been carefully closed.

As they came up the hills, Harold turned to Haco and said: "Where is thy battle-axe?"

"Harold," answered Haco, with more than his usual tone of sombre sadness, "I desire now to be thy shield-bearer, for thou must use thine axe with both hands while the day lasts, and thy shield is useless. Wherefore thou strike, and I will shield thee."

"Thou lovest me, then, son of Sweyn; I have sometimes doubted it."

"I love thee as the best part of my life, and with thy life ceases mine: it is my heart that my shield guards when it covers the breast of Harold."

"I would bid thee live, poor youth," whispered Harold; "but what were life if this day were lost? Happy, then, will be those who die!"

Scarce had the words left his lips ere he sprang to the breastworks, and with a sudden sweep of his axe, down dropped a helm that peered above them. But helm after helm succeeds. Now they come on, swarm upon swarm, as wolves on a traveller, as bears round a bark. Countless, amidst their carnage, on they come! The arrows of the Norman blacken the air: with deadly precision, to each arm, each limb, each front exposed above the bulwarks—whirrs the shaft. They clamber the palisades, the foremost fall dead under the Saxon axe; new thousands rush on: vain is the might of Harold, vain had been a Harold's might in every Saxon there! The first row of breastworks is forced—it is trampled, hewed, crushed down, cumbered with the dead. "Ha Rou! Ha Rou! Notre Dame! Notre Dame!" sounds joyous and shrill, the chargers snort and leap, and charge into the circle. High wheels in air the great mace of William; bright by the slaughterers flashes the crozier of the Church.

"On, Normans!—Earldom and land!" cries the Duke.

"On, Sons of the Church! Salvation and heaven!" shouts the voice of Odo.

The first breastwork down—the Saxons yielding inch by inch, foot by foot, are pressed, crushed back, into the second enclosure. The same rush, and swarm, and fight, and cry, and roar:—The second enclosure gives way. And now in the centre of the third—lo, before the eyes of the Normans, towers

proudly aloft, and shines in the rays of the westering sun, broidered with gold, and, blazing with mystic gems, the standard of England's King! And there, are gathered the reserve of the English host; there, the heroes who had never yet known defeat—unwearied they by the battle—vigorous, high-hearted still; and round them the breastworks were thicker, and stronger, and higher, and fastened by chains to pillars of wood and staves of iron, with the waggons and carts of the baggage, and piled logs of timber—barricades at which even William paused aghast, and Odo stifled an exclamation that became not a priestly lip.

Before that standard, in the front of the men, stood Gurth, and Leofwine, and Haco, and Harold, the last leaning for rest upon his axe, for he was sorely wounded in many places, and the blood oozed through the links of his mail.

Live, Harold; live yet, and Saxon England shall not die!

The English archers had at no time been numerous; most of them had served with the vanguard, and the shafts of those within the ramparts were spent; so that the foe had time to pause and to breathe. The Norman arrows meanwhile flew fast and thick, but William noted to his grief that they struck against the tall breastworks and barricades, and so failed in the slaughter they should inflict.

He mused a moment, and sent one of his knights to call to him three of the chiefs of the archers. They were soon at the side of his destrier.

"See ye not, *maladroits*," said the Duke, "that your shafts and bolts fall harmless on those ozier walls?

Shoot in the air; let the arrow fall perpendicular on those within—fall as the vengeance of the saints falls —direct from heaven! Give me thy bow, Archer,— thus." He drew the bow as he sate on his steed, the arrow flashed up, and descended in the heart of the reserve, within a few feet of the standard.

"So; that standard be your mark," said the Duke, giving back the bow.

The archers withdrew. The order circulated through their bands, and in a few moments more down came the iron rain. It took the English host as by surprise, piercing hide cap, and even iron helm; and in the very surprise that made them instinctively look up—death came.

A dull groan as from many hearts boomed from the entrenchments on the Norman ear.

"Now," said William, "they must either use their shields to guard their heads—and their axes are useless—or while they smite with the axe they fall by the shaft. On now to the ramparts. I see my crown already resting on yonder standard!"

Yet, despite all, the English bear up; the thickness of the palisades, the comparative smallness of the last enclosure, more easily therefore manned and maintained by the small force of the survivors, defy other weapons than those of the bow. Every Norman who attempts to scale the breastwork is slain on the instant, and his body cast forth under the hoofs of the baffled steeds. The sun sinks near and nearer towards the red horizon.

"Courage!" cries the voice of Harold, "hold but till nightfall, and ye are saved. Courage and freedom!"

"Harold and Holy Crosse!" is the answer.

Still foiled, William again resolves to hazard his fatal stratagem. He marked that quarter of the enclosure which was most remote from the chief point of attack —most remote from the provident watch of Harold, whose cheering voice, ever and anon, he recognised amidst the hurtling clamour. In this quarter the palisades were the weakest, and the ground the least elevated; but it was guarded by men on whose skill with axe and shield Harold placed the firmest reliance—the Anglo-Danes of his old East-Anglian earldom. Thither, then, the Duke advanced a chosen column of his heavy-armed foot, tutored especially by himself in the rehearsals of his favourite *ruse*, and accompanied by a band of archers; while at the same time, he himself, with his brother Odo, headed a considerable company of knights under the son of the great Roger de Beaumont, to gain the contiguous level heights on which now stretches the little town of "Battle;" there to watch and to aid the manœuvre. The foot column advanced to the appointed spot, and after a short, close, and terrible conflict, succeeded in making a wide breach in the breastworks. But that temporary success only animates yet more the exertions of the beleaguered defenders, and swarming round the breach, and pouring through it, line after line of the foe drop beneath their axes. The column of the heavy-armed Normans fall back down the slopes—they give way —they turn in disorder—they retreat—they fly; but the archers stand firm, midway on the descent—those archers seem an easy prey to the English—the temptation is irresistible. Long galled, and harassed, and maddened by the shafts, the Anglo-Danes rushed forth

at the heels of the Norman swordsmen, and sweeping down to exterminate the archers, the breach that they leave gapes wide.

"Forward," cries William, and he gallops towards the breach.

"Forward," cries Odo, "I see the hands of the holy saints in the air! Forward! it is the Dead that wheel our war-steeds round the living!"

On rush the Norman knights. But Harold is already in the breach, rallying around him hearts eager to replace the shattered breastworks.

"Close shields! Hold fast!" shouts his kingly voice.

Before him were the steeds of Bruse and Grantmesnil. At his breast their spears:—Haco holds over the breast the shield. Swinging aloft with both hands his axe, the spear of Grantmesnil is shivered in twain by the King's stroke. Cloven to the skull rolls the steed of Bruse. Knight and steed roll on the bloody sward.

But a blow from the sword of De Lacy has broken down the guardian shield of Haco. The son of Sweyn is stricken to his knee. With lifted blades and whirling maces the Norman knights charge through the breach.

"Look up, look up, and guard thy head," cries the fatal voice of Haco to the King.

At that cry the King raises his flashing eyes. Why halts his stride? Why drops the axe from his hand? As he raised his head, down came the hissing death-shaft. It smote the lifted face; it crushed into the dauntless eyeball. He reeled, he staggered, he fell

back several yards, at the foot of his gorgeous standard. With desperate hand he broke the head of the shaft, and left the barb, quivering in the anguish.

Gurth knelt over him.

"Fight on," gasped the King, "conceal my death! Holy Crosse! England to the rescue! woe—woe!"

Rallying himself a moment, he sprang to his feet, clenched his right hand, and fell once more,—a corpse.

At the same moment a simultaneous rush of horsemen towards the standard bore back a line of Saxons, and covered the body of the King with heaps of the slain.

His helmet cloven in two, his face all streaming with blood, but still calm in its ghastly hues, amidst the foremost of those slain, fell the fated Haco. He fell with his head on the breast of Harold, kissed the bloody cheek with bloody lips, groaned, and died.

Inspired by despair with superhuman strength, Gurth, striding over the corpses of his kinsmen, opposed himself singly to the knights; and the entire strength of the English remnant, coming round him at the menaced danger to the standard, once more drove off the assailants.

But now all the enclosure was filled with the foe, the whole space seemed gay, in the darkening air, with banderols and banners. High, through all, rose the club of the Conqueror; high, through all, shone the crozier of the Churchman. Not one Englishman fled; all now centring round the standard, they fell, slaughtering if slaughtered. Man by man, under the charmed

banner, fell the lithsmen of Hilda. Then died the faithful Sexwolf. Then died the gallant Godrith, redeeming, by the death of many a Norman, his young fantastic love of the Norman manners. Then died, last of such of the Kent-men as had won retreat from their scattered vanguard into the circle of closing slaughter, the English-hearted Vebba.

Even still in that age, when the Teuton had yet in his veins the blood of Odin, the demi-god,—even still one man could delay the might of numbers. Through the crowd, the Normans beheld with admiring awe, —here, in the front of their horse, a single warrior, before whose axe spear shivered, helm drooped;— there, close by the standard, standing breast-high among the slain, one still more formidable, and even amidst ruin unvanquished. The first fell at length under the mace of Roger de Montgommeri. So, unknown to the Norman poet (who hath preserved in his verse the deeds but not the name), fell, laughing in death, young Leofwine! Still by the enchanted standard towers the other; still the enchanted standard waves aloft, with its brave ensign of the solitary "Fighting Man" girded by the gems that had flashed in the crown of Odin.

"Thine be the honour of lowering that haughty flag," cried William, turning to one of his favourite and most famous knights, Robert de Tessin.

Overjoyed, the knight rushed forward, to fall by the axe of that stubborn defender.

"Sorcery," cried Fitzosborne, "sorcery. This is no man, but fiend."

"Spare him, spare the brave," cried in a breath Bruse, D'Aincourt, and De Graville.

William turned round in wrath at the cry of mercy, and spurring over all the corpses, with the sacred banner borne by Tonstain close behind him, so that it shadowed his helmet,—he came to the foot of the standard, and for one moment was single battle between the Knight-Duke and the Saxon hero. Nor, even then, conquered by the Norman sword, but exhausted by a hundred wounds, that brave chief fell,[1] and the falchion vainly pierced him, falling. So, last man at the standard, died Gurth.

The sun had set, the first star was in heaven, the "Fighting Man" was laid low, and on that spot where now, all forlorn and shattered, amidst stagnant water, stands the altar-stone of Battle Abbey, rose the glittering dragon that surmounted the consecrated banner of the Norman victor.

CHAPTER IX

Close by his banner, amidst the piles of the dead, William the Conqueror pitched his pavilion, and sate at meat. And over all the plain, far and near, torches were moving like meteors on a marsh; for the Duke had permitted the Saxon women to search for the bodies of their lords. And as he sate, and talked, and

[1] Thus Waçe,

"Guert (Gurth) vit Engleiz amenuisier,
Vi K'il n'i ont nul recovrier," &c.

"Gurth saw the English diminish, and that there was no hope to retrieve the day; the Duke pushed forth with such force, that he reached him, and struck him with great violence (*par grant air*). I know not if he died by the stroke, but it is said that it laid him low."

Still by the enchanted standard towers the other.

laughed, there entered the tent two humble monks: their lowly mien, their dejected faces, their homely serge, in mournful contrast to the joy and the splendour of the Victory-Feast.

They came to the Conqueror, and knelt.

"Rise up, sons of the Church," said William, mildly, "for sons of the Church are *we!* Deem not that we shall invade the rights of the religion which we have come to avenge. Nay, on this spot we have already sworn to build an abbey that shall be the proudest in the land, and where masses shall be sung evermore for the repose of the brave Normans who fell in this field, and for mine and my consort's soul."

"Doubtless," said Odo, sneering, "the holy men have heard already of this pious intent, and come to pray for cells in the future abbey."

"Not so," said Osgood, mournfully, and in barbarous Norman; "we have our own beloved convent at Waltham, endowed by the prince whom thine arms have defeated. We come to ask but to bury in our sacred cloisters the corpse of him so lately King over all England—our benefactor, Harold."

The Duke's brow fell.

"And see," said Ailred, eagerly, as he drew out a leathern pouch, "we have brought with us all the gold that our poor crypts contained, for we misdoubted this day," and he poured out the glittering pieces at the Conqueror's feet.

"No!" said William, fiercely, "we take no gold for a traitor's body; no, not if Githa, the usurper's mother, offered us its weight in the shining metal; unburied be the Accursed of the Church, and let the birds of prey feed their young with his carcase!"

Two murmurs, distinct in tone and in meaning, were heard in that assembly: the one of approval from fierce mercenaries, insolent with triumph; the other of generous discontent and indignant amaze, from the large majority of Norman nobles.

But William's brow was still dark, and his eye still stern; for his policy confirmed his passions; and it was only by stigmatising, as dishonoured and accursed, the memory and cause of the dead King, that he could justify the sweeping spoliation of those who had fought against himself, and confiscate the lands to which his own Queens and warriors looked for their reward.

The murmurs had just died into a thrilling hush, when a woman, who had followed the monks unperceived and unheeded, passed with a swift and noiseless step to the Duke's foot-stool; and, without bending knee to the ground, said, in a voice which, though low, was heard by all:

"Norman, in the name of the women of England, I tell thee that thou darest not do this wrong to the hero who died in defence of their hearths and their children!"

Before she spoke she had thrown back her hood; her hair dishevelled, fell over her shoulders, glittering like gold, in the blaze of the banquet-lights; and that wondrous beauty, without parallel amidst the dames of England, shone like the vision of an accusing angel, on the eyes of the startled Duke, and the breathless knights. But twice in her life Edith beheld that awful man. Once, when roused from her reverie of innocent love by the holiday pomp of his trumps and banners, the childlike maid stood at the foot of the grassy

knoll; and once again, when in the hour of his triumph, and amidst the wrecks of England on the field of Sanguelac, with a soul surviving the crushed and broken heart, the faith of the lofty woman defended the Hero Dead.

There, with knee unbent, and form unquailing, with marble cheek, and haughty eye, she faced the Conqueror; and, as she ceased, his noble barons broke into bold applause.

"Who art thou?" said William, if not daunted at least amazed. "Methinks I have seen thy face before; thou art not Harold's wife or sister?"

"Dread lord," said Osgood; "she was the betrothed of Harold; but, as within the degrees of kin, the Church forbade their union, and they obeyed the Church."

Out from the banquet-throng stepped Mallet de Graville. "O my liege," said he, "thou hast promised me lands and earldom; instead of these gifts undeserved, bestow on me the right to bury and to honour the remains of Harold; to-day I took from him my life, let me give all I can in return—a grave!"

William paused, but the sentiment of the assembly, so clearly pronounced, and, it may be, his own better nature, which, ere polluted by plotting craft, and hardened by despotic ire, was magnanimous and heroic, moved and won him. "Lady," said he, gently, "thou appealest not in vain to Norman knighthood: thy rebuke was just, and I repent me of a hasty impulse. Mallet de Graville, thy prayer is granted; to thy choice be consigned the place of burial, to thy care the funeral rites of him whose soul hath passed out of human judgment."

The feast was over; William the Conqueror slept on his couch, and round him slumbered his Norman knights, dreaming of baronies to come; and still the torches moved dismally to and fro the waste of death, and through the hush of night was heard near and far the wail of women.

Accompanied by the brothers of Waltham, and attended by link-bearers, Mallet de Graville was yet engaged in the search for the royal dead—and the search was vain. Deeper and stiller, the autumnal moon rose to its melancholy noon, and lent its ghastly aid to the glare of the redder lights. But, on leaving the pavilion, they had missed Edith; she had gone from them alone, and was lost in that dreadful wilderness. And Ailred said despondingly:

"Perchance we may already have seen the corpse we search for, and not recognised it; for the face may be mutilated with wounds. And therefore it is that Saxon wives and mothers haunt our battle-fields, discovering those they search by signs not known without the household."[1]

"Ay," said the Norman, "I comprehend thee, by the letter or device, in which, according to your customs, your warriors impress on their own forms some token of affection, or some fancied charm against ill."

"It is so," answered the monk; "wherefore I grieve that we have lost the guidance of the maid."

[1] The suggestions implied in the text will probably be admitted as correct; when we read in the Saxon annals of the recognition of the dead, by peculiar marks on their bodies; the obvious, or at least the most natural explanation of those signs, is to be found in the habit of puncturing the skin, mentioned by the Malmesbury chronicler.

While thus conversing, they had retraced their steps, almost in despair, towards the Duke's pavilion.

"See," said De Graville, "how near yon lonely woman hath come to the tent of the Duke—yea, to the foot of the holy gonfanon, which supplanted 'the Fighting Man!' *pardex*, my heart bleeds to see her striving to lift up the heavy dead!"

The monks neared the spot, and Osgood exclaimed in a voice almost joyful:

"It is Edith the Fair! This way, the torches! hither, quick!"

The corpses had been flung in irreverent haste from either side of the gonfanon, to make room for the banner of the conquest, and the pavilion of the feast. Huddled together, they lay in that holy bed. And the woman silently, and by the help of no light save the moon, was intent on her search. She waved her hand impatiently as they approached, as if jealous of the dead; but as she had not sought, so neither did she oppose, their aid. Moaning low to herself, she desisted from her task, and knelt watching them, and shaking her head mournfully, as they removed helm after helm, and lowered the torches upon stern and livid brows. At length the lights fell red and full on the ghastly face of Haco—proud and sad as in life.

De Graville uttered an exclamation: "The King's nephew: be sure the King is near!"

A shudder went over the woman's form, and the moaning ceased.

They unhelmed another corpse; and the monks and the knight, after one glance, turned away sickened and awe-stricken at the sight: for the face was all defeatured and mangled with wounds; and nought could

they recognise save the ravaged majesty of what had been man. But at the sight of that face a wild shriek broke from Edith's heart.

She started to her feet—put aside the monks with a wild and angry gesture, and bending over the face, sought with her long hair to wipe from it the clotted blood; then with convulsive fingers, she strove to loosen the buckler of the breast-mail. The knight knelt to assist her. "No, no," she gasped out. "He is mine—mine now!"

Her hands bled as the mail gave way to her efforts; the tunic beneath was all dabbled with blood. She rent the folds, and on the breast, just above the silenced heart, were punctured in the old Saxon letters, the word "EDITH;" and just below, in characters more fresh, the word "ENGLAND."

"See, see!" she cried in piercing accents; and, clasping the dead in her arms, she kissed the lips, and called aloud, in words of the tenderest endearments, as if she addressed the living. All there knew then that the search was ended; all knew that the eyes of love had recognised the dead.

"Wed, wed," murmured the betrothed; "wed at last! O Harold, Harold! the words of the Vala were true—and Heaven is kind!" and laying her head gently on the breast of the dead, she smiled and died.

At the east end of the choir in the Abbey of Waltham, was long shown the tomb of the Last Saxon King, inscribed with the touching words—"Harold Infelix." But not under that stone, according to the chronicler who should best know the truth,[1] mouldered

[1] The contemporary Norman chronicler, William of Poitiers. See Note (R).

the dust of him in whose grave was buried an epoch in human annals.

"Let his corpse," said William the Norman, "let his corpse guard the coasts, which his life madly defended. Let the seas wail his dirge, and girdle his grave; and his spirit protect the land which hath passed to the Norman's sway."

And Mallet de Graville assented to the word of his chief, for his knightly heart turned into honour the latent taunt; and well he knew, that Harold could have chosen no burial spot so worthy his English spirit and his Roman end.

The tomb at Waltham would have excluded the faithful ashes of the betrothed, whose heart had broken on the bosom she had found; more gentle was the grave in the temple of heaven, and hallowed by the bridal death-dirge of the everlasting sea.

So, in that sentiment of poetry and love, which made half the religion of a Norman knight, Mallet de Graville suffered death to unite those whom life had divided. In the holy burial-ground that encircled a small Saxon chapel, on the shore, and near the spot on which William had leapt to land, one grave received the betrothed; and the tomb of Waltham only honoured an empty name.[1]

Eight centuries have rolled away, and where is the Norman now? or where is not the Saxon? The little urn that sufficed for the mighty lord[2] is despoiled of

[1] See Note (R).

[2] "Rex magnus parvâ jacet hic Gulielmus in urnâ—
Sufficit et magno parva Domus Domino."

From William the Conqueror's epitaph (ap-Gemiticen). His bones are said to have been disinterred some centuries after his death.

his very dust; but the tombless shade of the kingly freeman still guards the coasts, and rests upon the seas. In many a noiseless field, with Thoughts for Armies, your relics, O Saxon Heroes, have won back the victory from the bones of the Norman saints; and whenever, with fairer fates, Freedom opposes Force, and Justice, redeeming the old defeat, smites down the armed Frauds that would consecrate the wrong,—smile, O soul of our Saxon Harold, smile, appeased, on the Saxon's land!

NOTES

Note (N), page 27.

Unguents used by Witches.

Lord Bacon, speaking of the ointments used by the witches, supposes that they really did produce illusions by stopping the vapours and sending them to the head. It seems that all witches who attended the *sabbat* used these unguents, and there is something very remarkable in the concurrence of their testimonies as to the scenes they declared themselves to have witnessed, not in the body, which they left behind, but as present in the soul; as if the same anointments and preparatives produced dreams nearly similar in kind. To the believers in mesmerism I may add, that few are aware of the extraordinary degree to which somnambulism appears to be heightened by certain chemical aids; and the disbelievers in that agency, who have yet tried the experiments of some of those now neglected drugs to which the medical art of the Middle Ages attached peculiar virtues, will not be inclined to dispute the powerful and, as it were, systematic effect which certain drugs produce on the imagination of patients with excitable and nervous temperaments.

Note (O), page 31.

Hilda's Adjurations.

I.

"By the Urdar fount dwelling,
Day by day from the rill,
The Nornas besprinkle
The Ash Ygg-drasill."

The Ash Ygg-drasill.—Much learning has been employed by Scandinavian scholars in illustrating the symbols supposed

to be couched under the myth of the Ygg-drasill, or the great Ash-tree. With this I shall not weary the reader; especially since large systems have been built on very small premises, and the erudition employed has been equally ingenious and unsatisfactory: I content myself with stating the simple myth.

The Ygg-drasill has three roots; two spring from the infernal regions—*i.e.* from the home of the frost-giants, and from Niffl-heim, "vapour-home, or hell"—one from the heavenly abode of the Asas. Its branches, says the Prose Edda, extend over the whole universe, and its stem bears up the earth. Beneath the root, which stretches through Niffl-heim, and which the snake-king continually gnaws, is the fount whence flow the infernal rivers. Beneath the root, which stretches in the land of the giants, is Mimir's well wherein all wisdom is concealed; but under the root which lies in the land of the gods, is the well of Urda, the Norna—here the gods sit in judgment. Near this well is a fair building, whence issue the three maidens, Urda, Verdandi, Skulda (the Past, the Present, the Future). Daily they water the ash-tree from Urda's well, that the branches may not perish. Four harts constantly devour the buds and branches of the Ash-tree. On its boughs sits an eagle, wise in much; and between its eyes sits a hawk. A squirrel runs up and down the tree sowing strife between the eagle and the snake.

Such, in brief, is the account of the myth. For the various interpretations of its symbolic meaning, the general reader is referred to Mr. Blackwell's edition of MALLETT'S *Northern Antiquities*, and PIGOTT'S *Scandinavian Manual*.

NOTE (P), PAGE 167.

Harold's Accession.

There are, as is well known, two accounts as to Edward the Confessor's death-bed disposition of the English crown. The Norman chroniclers affirm, first, that Edward promised William the crown during his exile in Normandy; secondly, that Siward, Earl of Northumbria, Godwin, and Leofric had taken oath, "*serment de la main*," to receive him as Seigneur after Edward's death, and that the hostages, Wolnoth and Haco,

were given to the Duke in pledge of that oath;[1] thirdly, that Edward left him the crown by will.

Let us see what probability there is of truth in these three assertions.

First, Edward promised William the crown when in Normandy.

This seems probable enough, and it is corroborated indirectly by the Saxon chroniclers, when they unite in relating Edward's warnings to Harold against his visit to the Norman court. Edward might well be aware of William's designs on the crown (though in those warnings he refrains from mentioning them)—might remember the authority given to those designs by his own early promise, and know the secret purpose for which the hostages were retained by William, and the advantages he would seek to gain from having Harold himself in his power. But this promise in itself was clearly not binding on the English people, nor on any one but Edward, who, without the sanction of the Witan, could not fulfil it. And that William himself could not have attached great importance to it during Edward's life, is clear, because if he had, the time to urge it was when Edward sent into Germany for the Atheling, as the heir presumptive of the throne. This was a virtual annihilation of the promise; but William took no step to urge it, made no complaint and no remonstrance.

Secondly, That Godwin, Siward, and Leofric, had taken oaths of fealty to William.

This appears a fable wholly without foundation. When could those oaths have been pledged? Certainly not after Harold's visit to William, for they were then all dead. At the accession of Edward? This is obviously contradicted by the stipulation which Godwin and the other chiefs of the Witan exacted, that Edward should not come accompanied by Norman supporters—by the evident jealousy of the Normans entertained by those chiefs, as by the whole English people, who regarded the alliance of Ethelred with the Norman Emma as the cause of the greatest calamities—and by the marriage of Edward himself with Godwin's daughter, a marriage which that Earl might naturally presume would give legitimate heirs to the throne.—In the interval between Edward's accession

[1] William of Poitiers.

and Godwin's outlawry? No; for all the English chroniclers, and, indeed, the Norman, concur in representing the ill-will borne by Godwin and his House to the Norman favourites, whom, if they could have anticipated William's accession, or were in any way bound to William, they would have naturally conciliated. But Godwin's outlawry is the result of the breach between him and the foreigners.—In William's visit to Edward? No; for that took place when Godwin was an exile; and even the writers who assert Edward's early promise to William, declare that nothing was then said as to the succession to the throne. To Godwin's return from outlawry the Norman chroniclers seem to refer the date of this pretended oath, by the assertion that the hostages were given in pledge of it. This is the most monstrous supposition of all; for Godwin's return is followed by the banishment of the Norman favourites—by the utter downfall of the Norman party in England—by the decree of the Witan, that all the troubles in England had come from the Normans—by the triumphant ascendancy of Godwin's House. And is it credible for a moment, that the great English Earl could then have agreed to a pledge to transfer the kingdom to the very party he had expelled, and expose himself and his party to the vengeance of a foe he had thoroughly crushed for the time, and whom, without any motive or object, he himself agreed to restore to power or his own probable perdition? When examined, this assertion falls to the ground from other causes. It is not among the arguments that William uses in his embassies to Harold; it rests mainly upon the authority of William of Poitiers, who, though a contemporary, and a good authority on some points purely Norman, is grossly ignorant as to the most accredited and acknowledged facts, in all that relate to the English. Even with regard to the hostages, he makes the most extraordinary blunders. He says they were sent by Edward, with the consent of his nobles, accompanied by Robert, Archbishop of Canterbury. Now Robert, Archbishop of Canterbury, had fled from England as fast as he could fly on the return of Godwin; and arrived in Normandy, half drowned, before the hostages were sent, or even before the Witan which reconciled Edward and Godwin had assembled. He says that William restored to Harold "his young brother;" whereas it was Haco, the

nephew, who was restored; we know, by Norman as well as Saxon Chroniclers, that Wolnoth, the brother, was not released till after the Conqueror's death, (he was re-imprisoned by Rufus;) and his partiality may be judged by the assertions, first, that "William gave nothing to a Norman that was unjustly taken from an Englishman;" and secondly, that Odo, whose horrible oppressions revolted even William himself, "never had an equal for justice, and that all the English obeyed him willingly."

We may, therefore, dismiss this assertion as utterly groundless, on its own merits, without directly citing against it the Saxon authorities.

Thirdly, That Edward left William the crown by will.

On this assertion alone, of the three, the Norman Conqueror himself seems to have rested a positive claim.[1] But if so, where was the will? Why was it never produced or producible? If destroyed, where were the witnesses? why were they not cited? The testamentary dispositions of an Anglo-Saxon king were always respected, and went far towards the succession. But it was absolutely necessary to prove them before the Witan.[2] An oral act of this kind, in the words of the dying Sovereign, would be legal, but they must be confirmed by those who heard them. Why, when William was master of England, and acknowledged by a National Assembly convened in London, and when all who heard the dying King would have been naturally disposed to give every evidence in William's favour, not only to flatter the new sovereign, but to soothe the national pride, and justify the Norman suc-

[1] He is considered to refer to such bequest in one of his charters: Devicto Harlodo rege cum suis complicibus qui michi regnum prudentiâ Domini destinatum, et beneficio concessionis Domini et cognati mei gloriosi regis Edwardi concessum conati sunt auferre."—FORESTINA, A. 3.

But William's word is certainly not to be taken, for he never scrupled to break it; and even in these words he does not state that it was left him by Edward's will, but destined and given to him—words founded, perhaps, solely on the promise referred to, before Edward came to the throne, corroborated by some messages in the earlier years of his reign, through the Norman Archbishop of Canterbury, who seems to have been a notable intriguer to that end.

[2] Palgrave, "Commonwealth," 560.

cession by a more popular plea than conquest,—why were no witnesses summoned to prove the bequest! Alred, Stigand, and the Abbot of Westminster, must have been present at the death-bed of the King, and these priests concurred in submission to William. If they had any testimony as to Edward's bequest in his favour, would they not have been too glad to give it, in justification of themselves, in compliment to William, in duty to the people, in vindication of law against force! But no such attempt at proof was ventured upon.

Against these, the mere assertion of William, and the authority of Normans who could know nothing of the truth of the matter, while they had every interest to misrepresent the facts—we have the positive assurances of the best possible authorities. The Saxon Chronicle (worth all the other annalists put together) says expressly, that Edward left the crown to Harold:

> "The sage, ne'ertheless,
> The realm committed
> To a highly-born man;
> Harold's self,
> The noble Earl.
> He in all time
> Obeyed faithfully
> His rightful lord,
> By words and deeds;
> Nor aught neglected
> Which needful was
> To his sovereign king."

Florence of Worcester, the next best authority, (valuable from supplying omissions in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle,) says expressly that the King chose Harold for his successor before his decease,[1] that he was elected by the chief men of all England, and consecrated by Alred. Hoveden, Simon (Dunelm.), the Beverley chronicler, confirm these authorities as to Ed-

[1] "Quo tumulato, subregulus Haroldus Godwin Ducis filius, quem rex ante suam decessionem regni successorem elegerat, à totius Angliæ primatibus, ad regale culmen electus, die eodem ab Aldredo Eboracensi Archiepiscopo in regem est honorifice consecratus."—Flor. *Wig.*

ward's choice of Harold as his successor. William of Malmesbury, who is not partial to Harold, writing in the reign of Henry the First, has doubts himself as to Edward's bequest, (though grounded on a very bad argument, viz. "the improbability that Edward would leave his crown to a man of whose power he had always been jealous;" there is no proof that Edward had been jealous of *Harold's* power—he had been of *Godwin's;*) but Malmesbury gives a more valuable authority than his own, in the concurrent opinion of his time, for he deposes that "*the English say,*" the diadem was granted him (Harold) by the King.

These evidences are, to say the least, infinitely more worthy of historical credence than the one or two English chroniclers, of little comparative estimation, (such as Wike,) and the prejudiced and ignorant Norman chroniclers,[1] who depose on behalf of William. I assume, therefore, that Edward left the crown to Harold; of Harold's better claim in the election of the Witan, there is no doubt. But Sir F. Palgrave starts the notion that, "admitting that the prelates, earls, aldermen, and thanes of Wessex and East-Anglia had sanctioned the accession of Harold, their decision could not have been obligatory on the other kingdoms (provinces); and the very short time elapsing between the death of Edward and the recognition of Harold, utterly precludes the supposition that their consent was even asked." This great writer must permit me, with all reverence, to suggest that he has, I think, forgotten the fact that, just prior to Edward's death, an assembly, fully as numerous as ever met in any national Witan, had been convened to attend the consecration of the new abbey and church of Westminster, which Edward considered the great work of his life; that assembly would certainly not have dispersed during a period so short and anxious as the mortal illness of the King, which appears to have prevented his attending the ceremony

[1] Some of these Norman chroniclers tell an absurd story of Harold's seizing the crown from the hand of the bishop, and putting it himself on his head. The Bayeux Tapestry, which is William's most connected apology for his claim, shows no such violence; but Harold is represented as crowned very peaceably. With more art, (as I have observed elsewhere,) the Tapestry represents Stigand as crowning him instead of Alred; Stigand being at that time under the Pope's interdict.

in person, and which ended in his death a very few days after the consecration. So that during the interval, which appears to have been at most about a week, between Edward's death and Harold's coronation,[1] the unusually large concourse of prelates and nobles from all parts of the kingdom assembled in London and Westminster would have furnished the numbers requisite to give weight and sanction to the Witan. And had it not been so, the Saxon chroniclers, and still more the Norman, would scarcely have omitted some remark in qualification of the election. But not a word is said as to any inadequate number in the Witan. And as for the two great principalities of Northumbria and Mercia, Harold's recent marriage with the sister of their earls might naturally tend to secure their allegiance.

Nor is it to be forgotten that a very numerous Witan had assembled at Oxford a few months before, to adjudge the rival claims of Tostig and Morcar; the decision of the Witan proves the alliance between Harold's party and that of the young Earl's—ratified by the marriage with Aldyth. And he who has practically engaged in the contests and cabals of party, will allow the probability, adopted as fact in the romance, that, considering Edward's years and infirm health, and the urgent necessity of determining beforehand the claims to the succession—some actual, if secret, understanding was then come to by the leading chiefs. It is a common error in history to regard as sudden, that which in the nature of affairs never can be sudden. All that paved Harold's way to the throne must have been silently settled long before the day in which the Witan elected him *unanimi omnium consensu*.[2]

With the views to which my examination of the records of the time have led me in favour of Harold, I can not but think that Sir F. Palgrave, in his admirable History of Anglo-Saxon England, does scanty justice to the Last of its kings; and that his peculiar political and constitutional theories, and his

[1] Edward died Jan. 5th. Harold's coronation is said to have taken place Jan. the 12th; but there is no very satisfactory evidence as to the precise day; indeed some writers would imply that he was crowned the day after Edward's death, which is scarcely possible.

[2] Vit. Harold. Chron. Ang. Norm.

attachment to the principle of hereditary succession, which make him consider that Harold "had no clear title to the crown any way," tincture with something like the prejudice of party his estimate of Harold's character and pretensions. My profound admiration for Sir F. Palgrave's learning and judgment would not permit me to make this remark without carefully considering and re-weighing all the contending authorities on which he himself relies. And I own that, of all modern historians, Thierry seems to me to have given the most just idea of the great actors in the tragedy of the Norman invasion, though I incline to believe that he has overrated the oppressive influence of the Norman dynasty in which the tragedy closed.

Note (Q), page 187.

Physical Peculiarities of the Scandinavians.

"It is a singular circumstance, that in almost all the swords of those ages to be found in the collection of weapons in the Antiquarian Museum at Copenhagen, the handles indicate a size of hand very much smaller than the hands of modern people of any class or rank. No modern dandy, with the most delicate hands, would find room for his hand to grasp or wield with ease some of the swords of these Northmen." [1]

This peculiarity is by some scholars adduced, not without reason, as an argument for the Eastern origin of the Scandinavian. Nor was it uncommon for the Asiatic Scythians, and indeed many of the early warlike tribes fluctuating between the east and west of Europe, to be distinguished by the blue eyes and yellow hair of the north. The physical attributes of a deity, or a hero, are usually to be regarded as those of the race to which he belongs. The golden locks of Apollo and Achilles are the sign of a similar characteristic in the nations of which they are the types; and the blue eye of Minerva belies the absurd doctrine that would identify her with the Egyptian Naith.

The Norman retained perhaps longer than the Scandinavian, from whom he sprang, the somewhat effeminate peculiarity of

[1] Laing's Note to Snorro Sturleson, vol. iii. p. 101.

small hands and feet; and hence, as throughout all the nobility of Europe the Norman was the model for imitation, and the ruling families in many lands sought to trace from him their descents, so that characteristic is, even to our day, ridiculously regarded as a sign of noble race. The Norman probably retained that peculiarity longer than the Dane, because his habits, as a conqueror, made him disdain all manual labour; and it was below his knightly dignity to walk, as long as a horse could be found for him to ride. But the Anglo-Norman (the noblest specimen of the great conquering family) became so blent with the Saxon, both in blood and in habits, that such physical distinctions vanished with the age of chivalry. The Saxon blood in our highest aristocracy now predominates greatly over the Norman; and it would be as vain a task to identify the sons of Hastings and Rollo by the foot and hand of the old Asiatic Scythian, as by the reddish auburn hair and the high features which were no less ordinarily their type. Here and there such peculiarities may all be seen amongst plain country gentlemen, settled from time immemorial in the counties peopled by the Anglo-Danes, and inter-marrying generally in their own provinces; but amongst the far more mixed breed of the larger landed proprietors comprehended in the Peerage, the Saxon attributes of race are strikingly conspicuous, and, amongst them, the large hand and foot common with all the Germanic tribes.

NOTE (R), PAGE 315.

The Interment of Harold.

Here we are met by evidences of the most contradictory character. According to most of the English writers, the body of Harold was given by William to Githa, without ransom, and buried at Waltham. There is even a story told of the generosity of the Conqueror, in cashiering a soldier who gashed the corpse of the dead hero. This last, however, seems to apply to some other Saxon, and not to Harold. But William of Poitiers, who was the Duke's own chaplain, and whose narration of the battle appears to contain more internal evidence of accuracy than the rest of his chronicle, expressly

says, that William refused Githa's offer of its weight in gold for the supposed corpse of Harold, and ordered it to be buried on the beach, with the taunt quoted in the text of this work—"Let him guard the coast which he madly occupied;" and on the pretext that one, whose cupidity and avarice had been the cause that so many men were slaughtered and lay unsepultured, was not worthy himself of a tomb. Orderic confirms this account, and says the body was given to William Mallet, for that purpose.[1]

Certainly William de Poitiers ought to have known best; and the probability of his story is to a certain degree borne out by the uncertainty as to Harold's positive interment, which long prevailed, and which even gave rise to a story related by Giraldus Cambrensis (and to be found also in the Harleian MSS.), that Harold survived the battle, became a monk in Chester, and before he died had a long and secret interview with Henry the First. Such a legend, however absurd, could scarcely have gained any credit if (as the usual story runs) Harold had been formally buried, in the presence of many of the Norman barons, in Waltham Abbey—but would very easily creep into belief, if his body had been carelessly consigned to a Norman knight, to be buried privately by the sea-shore.

The story of Osgood and Ailred, the childemaister (schoolmaster in the monastery), as related by Palgrave, and used in this romance, is recorded in a MS. of Waltham Abbey, and was written somewhere about fifty or sixty years after the event—say at the beginning of the twelfth century. These two monks followed Harold to the field, placed themselves so as to watch its results, offered ten marks for the body, obtained permission for the search, and could not recognise the

[1] This William Mallet was the father of Robert Mallet, founder of the Priory of Eye, in Suffolk (a branch of the House of Mallet de Graville).—Pluquet. He was also the ancestor of the great William Mallet (or Malet, as the old Scandinavian name was now corruptly spelt), one of the illustrious twenty-five "conservators" of Magna Charta. The family is still extant; and I have to apologise to Sir Alexander Malet, Bart. (Her Majesty's Minister at Stutgard), Lieut. Col. Charles St. Lo Malet, the Rev. William Windham Malet (Vicar of Ardley), and other members of that ancient House, for the liberty taken with the name of their gallant forefather.

mutilated corpse until Osgood sought and returned with Edith. In point of fact, according to this authority, it must have been two or three days after the battle before the discovery was made.

THE END